



# Gendered discourses and discursive strategies employed in Twitter-hashtagged debates about Saudi-Women's issues

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Department of English Language & Applied Linguistics | School of Literature and Languages**

**Lubna Mohammed Ahmed Bahammam**

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## **Declaration**

I, *Lubna Mohammed Ahmed Bahammam*, confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

## Abstract

*This study is motivated by Twitter's growing popularity as a space where Saudi men and women discuss issues pertaining to their lives without being stigmatised in an otherwise gender-segregated society. It aims to shed light on the multiple perspectives adopted by them to reveal an existing tension between tradition and modernity in SA (Yamani, 2000). Adopting an eclectic qualitative method, I draw from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tools to analyse the constellation of discourses that are related to gender and the discursive strategies used as resources for stance taking in a corpus of 1000 unique text-based tweets derived from two selected topical hashtags collected in June, 2015. These two hashtags mark the public reaction to a) newly-announced travel controls for Saudi women and b) statistics about the percentages of unmarried Saudi women. in.*

*The data provides evidence that voices of difference, protest, and dissent regarding women's rights and their social role are in a dialogic relation with dominant conservative discourses. The analysis reveals that hashtag contributors mainly engage in the evaluation of gendered discourses, epitomised by a predominant Discourse of Patriarchy, and a Discourse of Gender Equality and Human Rights. A Discourse of Patriarchy manifests in two mutually-supporting discourses: a discourse of dominance that privileges men and gives them control over women, and a discourse about the subordination of women. The Discourse of Gender Equality discusses women's retrieval of their full citizenship status, without the need for guardianship, and an equal social respect for their life choices, including those related to marriage and mobility.*

*While drawing on these discourses, contributors position themselves on a spectrum of conservative (anti-change) and progressive (pro-change) stances. By way of critiquing them, and sometimes, constructing new democratic social worldviews, the contributors show signs of engaging in a form of linguistic intervention to promote social change. Invocations of these discourses were manipulated for the macro-functions of perpetuating, undermining, or transforming existing discriminatory practices against women. Within these macro-strategies, other meso-discursive strategies were employed, namely referential and predicational strategies, assimilation and differentiation, legitimation and delegitimation, intensification and mitigation, and humour. These meso-strategies were fulfilled drawing on linguistic and semantic means including sarcasm, laughter, mock suggestions, comparison, metaphors, etc.*

*I argue that the identified patterns found in the Twitter data reflect as well as facilitate (on the discursive level) an ongoing gradual social change in the Saudi society since the unheard can now be heard and the dominant social practices involving women are being presented for public deliberation. In addition to contributing to the Arabic literature on discourse and gender, this study engages in an act of historicising these changes in SA and provides an assessment of the transformative potential of Twitter.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Declaration</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>List of Appendices [Enclosed CD]</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>List of Keywords</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Phonemic Transcription Key</b> .....	<b>xv</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1    Research rationale .....	2
1.2    Research problem .....	3
1.3    Research Aim and scope .....	3
1.4    Importance of the study .....	4
1.5    Epistemological orientation.....	6
1.6    Organisation of the thesis .....	6
<b>Chapter 2: Historical background</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1    The socio-cultural gender situation in SA</b> .....	<b>8</b>

2.2	Twitter’s social-transformative potential in SA .....	13
2.3	The uptake of hashtags as an interdiscursive space in SA .....	17
<b>Chapter 3: Conceptual and theoretical framework .....</b>		<b>19</b>
3.1	Conceptual framework .....	19
3.1.1	Language and society .....	19
3.1.2	Critical Discourse Analysis .....	21
3.2	Literature review .....	27
3.2.1	Gender in written and spoken communication .....	27
3.2.2	Gender studies in the ME .....	35
3.2.3	Gender and discourse in CMC studies .....	38
3.2.4	Studies on Twitter and its communicative functionality .....	48
3.2.5	Studies on Twitter in SA .....	62
3.3	Summary of key issues and research questions .....	65
<b>Chapter 4: Research Methodology .....</b>		<b>72</b>
4.1	Research design.....	72
4.2	Data collection.....	72
4.2.1	Capturing the data.....	74
4.2.2	Preparing the data .....	76
4.2.3	Uploading the data.....	86
4.3	Researcher’s positionality .....	87

4.4	Hashtag contributors .....	88
4.5	Analytical framework.....	88
4.5.1	Coding-based qualitative analysis .....	89
4.5.2	The naming and identification of discourses .....	91
4.5.3	The social actions approach (SAA).....	93
4.5.4	The discourse-historical approach (DHA).....	95
4.6	Data analysis procedures .....	98
4.6.1	Applying meta-data codes .....	98
4.6.2	Applying topical codes and identifying discourses .....	99
4.6.3	Examining discursive strategies .....	100
4.6.4	Engaging in critical reflexivity and inter-reliability .....	102
4.6.5	Presenting and explaining the findings.....	106
4.7	Anticipated outcomes, problems, and limitations .....	108
4.8	Ethical considerations .....	110
	<b>Chapter 5: Interdiscursive resources for stance taking.....</b>	<b>113</b>
5.1	An Overview .....	114
5.2	Central gendered discourses.....	117
5.2.1	A Discourse of Patriarchy.....	118
5.2.2	A Discourse of Gender Equality.....	142
5.3	Other related discourses .....	151

5.3.1	Meta-discourses .....	151
5.3.2	Religious discourses .....	155
5.3.3	Discourses about gender identity in SA .....	161
5.4	Platform-specific affordances as interdiscursive resources .....	168
5.5	Conclusion.....	176
<b>Chapter 6: The utilisation of discursive strategies .....</b>		<b>178</b>
6.1	An overview .....	178
6.2	Discursive strategies for anti-change contributors .....	179
6.2.1	Perpetuating existing social constructions.....	181
6.2.2	Legitimizing the status quo.....	194
6.2.3	Dismantling calls for change .....	200
6.3	Discursive strategies for pro-change contributors.....	205
6.3.1	Dismantling existing social constructions .....	208
6.3.2	Transforming the status quo .....	238
6.4	Conclusion.....	247
<b>Chapter 7: Discussion .....</b>		<b>249</b>
7.1	The emergence of a feminist movement in hashtag debates .....	249
7.2	Answering RQs .....	257
7.2.1	What broad discourses and underlying social constructions are drawn upon by contributors to the selected women-related hashtag debates about Saudi	



women? What interdiscursive links exist between them, and how are they used to reveal ideological positioning? ..... 257

7.2.2 What discursive strategies are used by the hashtag samples' contributors for the perpetuation, subversion, or disruption of prevalent discourses and gendered subject positions? And how are they linguistically realised? ..... 262

7.2.3 To what extent does Twitter as an (inter)discursive space have a transformative potential in facilitating social change in favour of women in SA? 265

**Chapter 8: Conclusion ..... 269**

8.1 Summary of findings ..... 269

8.2 Contribution of the study ..... 270

8.3 Implications of the Study ..... 271

8.4 Limitations of the Study ..... 272

8.5 Suggestions for future research ..... 275

8.6 Final thoughts ..... 276

**References ..... 278**

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Pasted Twitter content of the selected hashtag before cleaning .....	77
Figure 2: The document sets as they appear on MAXQDA's document system.....	86
Figure 3: Meta-data codes as they appear on MAXQDA's code system .....	98

## List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of hashtags about Saudi women as collected in June, 2015 .....	75
Table 2: Analytics of the number and percentages of relevant textual tweets in relation to irrelevant non-textual tweets .....	78
Table 3: A breakdown of the participation in the two selected hashtags .....	80
Table 4: Number of contributors before gender-classification of tweets .....	81
Table 5: Number of male/female-authored contributions to the samples .....	84
Table 6: Self-proclaimed gender of the contributors of the first 1000 tagged tweets .....	84
Table 7: Language varieties found in the samples .....	85
Table 8: A summary of the relevant discursive strategies to the present datasets .	101
Table 9: A summary of the inter-reliability process results .....	105
Table 10: An overview of the frequency of invocation of central and marginal discourses .....	115
Table 11: Summary of the invocations of the King as the national patriarch .....	122
Table 12: Summary of the invocations of male dominance and the guardianship rule .....	127
Table 13: Summary of the invocations of the subordination of women .....	132
Table 14: Summary of the invocations of Gender Equality .....	143
Table 15: Summary of the invocations of meta-discourses .....	152
Table 16: Summary of the use of religious discourse .....	155
Table 17: Summary of the use of quotations .....	156
Table 18: Summary of the use of discourse of gender identity .....	161
Table 19: The frequency of other hashtags .....	170
Table 20: A summary of the discursive strategies employed by anti-change tweeps .....	180
Table 21: A summary of the discursive strategies employed by pro-change tweeps .....	206

## **List of Appendices [Enclosed CD]**

Appendix I: Maxqda code system

Appendix II: Summary of the cross-checking procedure

Appendix III: Illustrative examples of Chapter 5

Appendix IV: Illustrative examples of Chapter 6

## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CDA</b>	Critical Discourse Analysis
<b>CMC</b>	Computer-Mediated Communication
<b>CMD</b>	Computer-Mediated Discourse
<b>DA</b>	Dialectal Arabic
<b>F2F</b>	Face-to-Face Communication
<b>FCDA</b>	Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis
<b>MSA</b>	Modern Standard Arabic
<b>ME</b>	Middle East
<b>PDA</b>	Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis
<b>SA</b>	Saudi Arabia
<b>SM</b>	Social Media
<b>SNS</b>	Social-Networking Sites

## **List of Keywords**

Social-networking, social media, Twitter, hashtags, critical discourse analysis, CDA, computer-mediated discourse, CMD, gender, Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Saudi women, Arabic, online debates, social change, discursive strategies

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## Phonemic Transcription Key

Whenever Arabic words are transliterated, the below transcriptions are adopted from Al-Khuli (1999).

*Table 1: Arabic Restricted Consonants*

No	Consonant	Transcription
1	/ط/	/T/
2	/ق/	/q/
3	/ء/	/ʔ/
4	/ض/	/D/
5	/ص/	/S/
6	/خ/	/x/
7	/ح/	/H/
8	/ظ/	/Ḍ/
9	/غ/	/G/
10	/ع/	/9/

*Table 2: Arabic Common Consonants*

No	Consonant	Transcription
1	/ب/	/b/
2	/ت/	/t/
3	/د/	/d/
4	/ك/	/k/
5	/ج/	/j/
6	/ف/	/f/
7	/ث/	/θ/
8	/ذ/	/ð/
9	/س/	/s/
10	/ز/	/z/
11	/ش/	/ʃ/
12	/ه/	/h/



13	/ل/	/l/
14	/م/	/m/
15	/ن/	/n/
16	/و/	/w/
17	/ر/	/r/
18	/ي/	/y/

**Table 3: Vowels and Diphthongs**

No	Vowel/Diphthong	Transcription
1	◌ِ	/i/
2	◌َ	/a/
3	ا	/a:/
4	◌ُ	/u/
5	ي	/iy/
6	ي + ◌َ	/ay/
7	و + ◌َ	/aw/
8	و + ◌ُ	/uw/

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“Can you believe this! I am a medical doctor who is over fifty and I have helped thousands of women bring their babies to the world. I represent my country in scientific conferences abroad. Yet, my son whom I cater for is my wali amr [custodian/guardian- and I can’t travel without his permission] #NewTravelControlsForSaudiWomen”*

@drsamia, Dr. Samia Alamoudi, June 8, 2015 [TweetID:#1F948] [explanation mine]

The above tweet, with 1928 retweets and 407 likes is an example of the numerous social-media posts describing the status of Saudi women in a male-dominated society. This thesis aims at exploring gender-related representations as expressed in hashtagged debates on women-related issues on Twitter. Posted mainly by Saudi microbloggers, trending hashtags may reveal how the public reacts to changes in Saudi women’s situation due to the virality of the debates within them. The discursive strategies used for stance taking in the studied hashtags represent the multi-voicedness found in the Saudi society regarding the status of women, indicating a trend heading towards greater freedoms. This is credited somewhat to the recent government’s initiatives, the most recent of which, was the lifting of the women-driving ban in September 2017. Such top-down decisions that promoted women’s rights led to controversies in the Saudi society. Reactions spanned between two dichotomous positions towards the changes: robust opposition by the conservatives on the one end, and strong support by the progressives on the other. The two groups engaged enthusiastically and emotionally with controversial topics and discursively expressed their positions drawing on socially-shared discourses, by either creatively defending the status quo of women or challenging it. With time, top-down changes gradually became normalised to gain acceptance (Almaghlouth, 2017).

This chapter presents the research problem by introducing two phenomena: the long-standing disadvantaged situation of Saudi women, and the pervasiveness of Twitter in the Saudi digital sphere as a relatively new discursive space for deliberation. In light of this rationale, I establish the motivation and significance of this doctoral thesis to explicate why this research area has drawn much attention in academic research recently before I state my epistemological orientation. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the subsequent chapters and concisely introduce each.

## 1.1 Research rationale

This thesis is motivated firstly by Twitter's growing popularity as a discursive space where Saudi men and women could debate issues pertaining to their lives in an otherwise gender-segregated society (e.g. Altoaimy, 2017). With the absence of women's voices from the public sphere and the lack of any organisations for women, it was easy to overlook their resistance to improve their situation, but Twitter has contributed to focusing attention on women's rights and their struggle for freedom, both nationally and internationally. Twitter has provided a platform for their voices to be amplified as they discussed issues affecting their lives. These issues centre around the constraints imposed on them as a manifestation of the country's devotion to religion and tradition. Secondly, it is motivated by the misrepresentations and stereotyping practices found in Western media about Saudi women who seem to have attracted much attention, particularly after 9/11. Interestingly, these stereotypes and misconstructions were found to exist even in Saudi media mediated in English. Al-Hejin's (2012) study, for example, has provided evidence that representations of Saudi women on the BBC and Arab News (an English Saudi newspaper) are mainly negative. They are presented as submissive and powerless. It would be interesting to see whether such offline negative patterns are present in the Twitter data samples considering that they are written in Arabic.

Thirdly, the inspiration of this work stems from the centrality of power struggles, women's rights, and the growing use of Twitter in Saudi Arabia, SA henceforward, to discuss and contest traditional gendered discourses. The present thesis attempts to unravel the present state of power relations between the sexes, especially in this transitional phase in the Saudi gender dynamics. In turn, it serves to answer the question of whether the microblogging system is used to reiterate and/or contest the dominant social structure of hierarchy while renegotiating gender roles and relations.

Thus, text-based online debates about women-related issues on Twitter hashtags as the 'mediational means' could prove useful to study this social phenomenon by critically examining them at the discursive level (Scollon, 2001). Gender-related hashtags were considered interesting as a source of data to best reflect changes in gender relations researched in this thesis because they are user-created and searchable on Twitter, and prominent and creatively used among Saudi users for countless functions, examples of which will be highlighted in the next chapter.

## 1.2 Research problem

Gender segregation, patriarchal structure, and cultural restrictions on Saudi women's participation in the public spheres of economy and politics have long had a restrictive influence on the quality of their lives. This has been widely publicised and criticised in Western media (Chaudhry, 2014). For example, on March 10, 2016, SA was claimed no.1 worst country for gender equality as ranked by *Perception*<sup>1</sup> because of its “strictest interpretations of *Sharia* law” and treating women as “minors under male guardians known as ‘*maHram*’, whom they are *not permitted to leave home without*” [emphasis mine]. These claims are problematic since they homogenise Saudi families and women as well as represent them as lacking agency; the idea of *maHram* is exaggerated as well. Do all Saudi women feel really oppressed? How do they and fellow male citizens feel about status quo/change?

Western activists see Saudi women as victimised and there is a belief that religion is the cause of oppression (Inglehard and Norris, 2004; Shortel and Kaluzny, 2006). However, this view that homogenises Saudi families and Saudi women and deprives them of agency in taking-up or challenging those socially-imposed subject positions is also prevalent in English-medium Arab news (Al-Hejin, 2012). In addition, how a society is organised is not a matter inherently prescribed by Islam itself nor can the status of women be immediately linked to it because it is clear on the outset that the situation of women varies across Muslim countries. Based on a comparative study of women's status across the Middle-Eastern region and between major religions, Moghadam (2003:5) asserts that Islam is “neither more nor less patriarchal than other major religions”.

## 1.3 Research Aim and scope

There has been evidence of the importance of Twitter in offering a popular online space for the Saudis because it has enabled them to overcome gender segregation to communicate, negotiate gendered roles and rights, and raise concerns with the help of the hashtagging practice (e.g. Altoaimy, 2017; Chaudhry, 2014; Sahly, 2016). Therefore, examining discourses by and about women while debating issues pertaining to their lives may offer valuable insight into current gender affairs in the Saudi social structure. The

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<sup>1</sup>Source: <http://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2016-03-10/the-10-worst-countries-for-gender-equality-ranked-by-perception>

present study aims to gain a multi-perspective insight into how the Saudis perceive women's issues in two selected hashtagged debates from June, 2015. The first pertains to restrictions imposed on Saudi women's travel and the second defines women by their marital status.

Although the data is relatively old (2015), the investigated topics continue to spark social debate and controversy offline and online, facilitated by the affordances of Twitter, which will also be assessed in the process of this research. Previous research on Twitter use has demonstrated its utilisation for the creation of affiliations and networked publics (Boyd, Golder, and Lotan 2010; Zappavigna, 2012) and political and social activism (AlRasheed, 2013; Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, Pearce, and boyd, 2011). As a discursive space, it has been used to disseminate and/or subvert discourses and normative gender representations that coherently reflect offline hierarchical structures, which are socially co-constructed to sustain patriarchal gender relations. In line with these studies, and more recent studies on the Saudi Twitter-sphere, e.g. Alharbi (2016), Almahmoud (2015), Sahly (2016), and Altoaimy (2017), the present thesis extends the focus on the gender division in the Saudi context on other hashtags than the driving ban at a time when this research area is just flourishing. It adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA henceforth) to relate socially-shared discursive constructions to their social context at large, and capture the linguistic practices and strategies involved when contributors are taking a stance against them.

#### **1.4 Importance of the study**

It is important to explore how women's issues are discussed against this background where a fast-developing country like SA is trying to assert its place on the international map and yet maintain its Islamic and cultural values. The need to explore women's issues is even more urgent because the broader research interest in the discursive deliberation of women-empowerment issues (or the absence of them) is just at its infancy in the Arab and Saudi literature on gender and discourse. In this thesis, Saudi gender roles and relations are found in two emerging gender-related hashtagged discussions to answer the penultimate question of whether and/or how Saudis are using discourse to reproduce existing male-endocentric discourses or to creatively subvert them. What sets it apart from relevant work in this area (Alharbi, 2016; Almahmoud, 2015; Altoaimy, 2017) is not that it examines existing discursive gender constructions as reflected on hashtags, other than

the driving ban campaigns, but also that it can document, historicise, and, perhaps, facilitate (on the discursive level), an ongoing gradual social change in the Saudi society by highlighting the traditional and subversive patterns found in hashtag samples. It affirms that the unheard can now be heard and the common-sense social practices involving women are being exposed for public discussion. Since the aim of this thesis is to contribute to this debate, respond to widely-circulating depictions of oppression and victimisation (Al-Hejin, 2012), and highlight stance taking and the multi-perspectiveness within the debates while ascribing agency and public support to women, the words ‘victimisation’ and ‘empowerment’ will be avoided within its context. The former passivates women and the latter presupposes women are powerless.

AlRasheed (2013) has contributed to the current discussions about whether society, culture, and religion are responsible for the marginalisation of Saudi women in the public sphere. She rejected the view of women as either superhero(ines) or victims and claims that gender stratification in SA is prescribed by religion. She asserted that it is the result of a complex interplay between many variables, e.g. class, ethnicity, and religious affiliation, which cut through the common perception of ‘women’ as homogenous because women experience discrimination in varied ways (AlRasheed, 2013). To express resistance, subversion, and dissent of their present situation, Saudi women migrated from the genre of the novel, which blurred the line between fiction and non-fiction, to the internet with its less repressive environment (ibid). It has amplified national issues and expanded their audiences and men and women can now debate issues. Encouraged by its anonymity and later the spread of mobile telephony, its communication technologies formed new online frontiers for women to call for their rights, which were a given before the *Sahwa* (the religious awakening movement of the 1980s and 90s).

The interest in the field of discourse and gender, springs from the scarcity of existing studies on the gendered discourses and socially-shared representations of men and women in Arabic, specifically in the gender-segregated context of SA, in comparison with the substantial volume of existing studies of representations in English on the subject. In addition to contributing to the Arabic literature on discourse and gender, this study provides an assessment of the transformative potential of Twitter. Overall, with the identification of salient discourses and strategies at work in the selected debate samples or with the eclectic methodological qualitative approach to the data, this thesis seeks to be worthy of academic interest.

## **1.5 Epistemological orientation**

This thesis is influenced by a feminist epistemological standpoint in that it acknowledges the great disparity between gendered lives in SA (Chaudhry, 2014, Lazar, 2005, 2007; Tschirhat, 2014). It is interpretivist in that it focuses on the subjective perspectives of the hashtags' contributors as they engaged in sense-making processes about the discussed issues while embedding these interpretations within the historical cultural background. For that reason, it was necessary to move away from the biological essentialism found in mapping gender to 'sex' and adopt a post-structuralist and socio-constructivist understanding of gender as a socially- and culturally-constructed phenomenon. It is an idea, or a set of ideas/beliefs expressed in and as discourse (Baxter, 2010; Butler, 1990; Sunderland, 2004). Gender is 'performative', a form of 'doing' (Butler, 1990) as well as of 'being' at a certain time and place (Gee, 1996:127; Gee, 2000:9), and is therefore complex, contextualised, multi-layered, constantly shifting, and often conflicting. The analysis follows an eclectic methodology drawing on CDA, and Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) models, namely Sunderland's (2004) naming and identification of discourses, Wodak and Reisigl's (2001, 2009) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Action Approach (SAA). It adopts post-structuralist conceptualisations of discourse to examine the utilisation of Twitter's basic affordances for debating women's issues and the way users position themselves within the gendered discourses they invoked into these debates, whether traditional or otherwise, with a focus on their creativity in discursively building their arguments. The socio-constructionist/post-structuralist approach to gender in discourse is found appropriate for the intended analysis because of its interest in constantly changing actions and processes. These processes index conflicting gendered identities and subject positions in the Saudi society, caught between the traditional and the progressive stances. This will allow traces of 'transgression' in the way gender is performed to emerge (Sunderland, 2004) that helps combat reductionist generalisations of Saudi women as victims of male control.

## **1.6 Organisation of the thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2:Chapter 2 provides a brief historical background of the social context of the thesis, that of women's situation and the use of social media (SM henceforward) in SA with emphasis on Twitter and its hashtagging

function. The dynamic tension between discourse, gender, and power is best interpreted within a CDA approach by embedding them in the broader social context. Such a critical investigation can uncover the present asymmetrical state of gender affairs while attempting to push for symmetry. After establishing the conceptual framework for the present endeavour, previous studies in the fields of discourse and gender offline and online will be reviewed in Chapter 3 with emphasis on current trends and controversies.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 details methodological procedures in a hope they may aid future researchers who wish to duplicate the study. It provides a rationale for the practical decisions made regarding the research design, data-collection of Twitter hashtags and handling, selection of the hashtags from which data was derived, and contributors. It also includes the choice of the analytical framework and procedures, anticipated outcomes, problems and limitations, and finally ethical considerations. Next, recurrent themes or discourses that are drawn upon by contributors to express their stance towards the status quo and change are discussed in Chapter 5 and the creative discursive strategies employed to operationalise such stance taking will be detailed in Chapter 6. These results are interpreted within the wider socio-cultural context in the Discussion (Chapter 7) and explained in relation to previous studies to see links or contradictions where a possible evolution in the discourse may be observed. The thesis concludes with Chapter 8 where the key findings, their implications, and the limitations encountered during research will be summarised, followed by suggestions for further research.



## Chapter 2: Historical background

Since the function of language is best understood within its context, this chapter places the research topic against the backdrop of the technological and social contexts of the investigated online debates. This is necessary since the arguments and positioning in these debates will be analysed using a CDA approach, which places emphasis on situating language use in broader historical and political contexts. Therefore, a brief historical background will be provided on the Saudi context, with a focus on how religious and economic factors have shaped the situation of Saudi women and the recent State-initiated reforms that have allowed women more participation into the public sphere, followed by a discussion of Twitter as the technical context and its socio-transformative potential. Afterwards, the uptake of hashtags as an interdiscursive space by the Saudis is examined. This background shows that the thesis is situated against a transitional social background regarding shifting gender relations in SA, especially with the growing use of social networks among Saudis.

### 2.1 The socio-cultural gender situation in SA

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932. It enjoys a prestigious religious status among Arabs and Muslims around the world because it houses the two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. It is known for its conservative religious way of life, often associated with ‘Wahhabi’ or ‘Salafi’<sup>2</sup> Islam. In the 1980s and 1990s, SA witnessed a religious awakening movement ‘*Sahwa*’, which propagated a discourse that limited itself to one strict interpretation of Islamic teachings, which was culturally made immune to criticism or negotiation while secularisation was vilified. This religious establishment enjoyed sustained control over society. It promoted conformity by ensuring people adopt model behaviours and practices as well as a certain external appearance, e.g. men attending public prayer, not playing music in public, and the short white dress for men or long black dress for women, to create a Muslim community that has a visible outward

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<sup>2</sup>Mohammed Abd Al-Wahhab was a Muslim preacher who has influenced the shape of religion in SA. He called for a return to the literal interpretation of sacred texts and the practices of the *Salaf* (Prophet’s companions), with an aim to filter out all forms of innovation and polytheistic practices from Islam in the then-Arabian Peninsula (Pompea, 2002)

identity (Pompea, 2002:61). Women were controlled because they were regarded as symbols of ‘this pious nation’ (AlRasheed, 2013:16-7).

The current gender situation in the Middle East (ME, henceforth) is characterised by two aspects: ideology and power struggles. Patriarchy and devotion to religion are deeply-rooted cultural principles in relation to women in Arabic-speaking societies (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2010). Historically speaking, a male-dominated system prevails in Arab families, establishing a hierarchical relation between men and women. The man is the supreme power and breadwinner of the house, even if his wife is working (Hamdan, 2005). His power is supported by the dominant interpretation of Qur’anic verses (Barlas, 2002). He is the defender and protector of his women’s honour and modesty. In addition, the notions of honour and modesty work with this patriarchal structure to govern the behaviour of people (Bassiouney, 2009:137).

Additionally, this hierarchically-organised system of gender stratification is evident in domestic as well as public interactions and reflected in language where lower-ranking persons are expected to accommodate higher-ranking persons in these stratified societies and this is realised in language (Ochs, 1992:351). For example, Arabic lexical items like ‘السيد’ /*Alsayiyd*/ (master), ‘رب الأسرة’ /*rabbu al?usrah*/ (family master), ‘محرم’ /*maHram*/ (guardian), ‘ولي أمر’ /*wali ?amr*/ (custodian), ‘وكيل’ /*waki:l*/ (a legal delegate or surrogate) are commonly used to refer to men while ‘حرمة’ /*Hormah*/ or ‘مرءة’ /*marah*/ (woman), ‘الأهل’ /*al?ahil*/ (the family), ‘العيال’ /*al9iya:l*/ (the kids), or ‘أم فلان’ /*?um* [the name of her son]/ (the mother of [a boy’s name]) are often used to refer to women in the presence of male strangers to conceal her name, also considered an honour to be protected.

Against this background, the situation in SA has come to epitomise patriarchy. SA is a male-dominated society, whose culture is influenced by the version of religion practised in it. Compared to other Arabic countries, Saudi women are restricted from mingling with men, which imposes physical limitations on them and excludes them from participation in the public sphere. Gender segregation was financially and technologically enabled, by the growth of the oil industry since the 1970s. To accommodate the need to conceal women, a unique structure of gender segregation has institutionalised parallel single-sex systems enabling women to study and work in gender-segregated academic, corporate, and health sectors (Chaudhry, 2014). The government introduced public free education for women in 1963, which was opposed by religious scholars who saw it as a violation of gender norms (Hamdan, 2005). Besides influencing organisational structures set for

education, work, appearance, and mobility to overcome difficulties imposed by the segregation, the country has institutionalised the guardianship law, which requires a woman to have a male family member to represent her in most of her affairs. The underlying assumptions and the resulting practices of a woman's need for a male guardian's protection and representation have permeated to the extent that women's legal and social status has been affected, treated as minors (Chaudhry, 2014; Mobaraki and Soderfeldt, 2010). Many 'damaging' stereotypes of them were popularised and their role was socially defined then supported by the government. Saudi women were, thus, excluded from the public sphere and any policy-making processes.

Similarly, traditional arranged marriages in SA are informed by the predominant masculine hierarchy and gender segregation. On the one hand, a woman's guardian often makes the decision of accepting or rejecting a suitor either directly without consulting her, or indirectly because she trusts his judgement as the sole source of information about the man who is proposing to her. A woman did not have any other source of information about or exposure to the man whom she was to marry other than his family name, lineage, and job title. On the other hand, from the suitor's side, the man is asked by his female family members, e.g. his mother or sisters, to define the 'qualities' of the woman he wants to marry so they could look for her in their acquaintances. These qualities are usually superficial, including age, colour of complexion, height, beauty, family background, and education in general, particularly religious education.

To preserve the community's religious identity, the religious establishment sought to shield the country and its citizens from exposure to other ways of life until it became impossible to do so for several factors. The educational system has been entrusted with the responsibility of preserving these traditional roles and fending off foreign pressures and criticisms through socialising students into their prescribed adult roles (El-Sanabary, 1994). The introduction of satellites and the internet in the 1990s and the growth of a globalised market have brought foreign experts to the country and increased exposure to other cultures even within households. These introductions were met with public scepticism and fear because the religious establishment at the time presented them as the tools of Satan and Western influence. After the 9/11 attacks in the USA, the country has been placed under global pressure to fight radicalisation and reconsider issues like the status of women, democracy, human rights, educational curricula, etc. It needed to meet international expectations to fulfil its desire to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Because of these circumstances, progress accelerated, even more with the initiation of the National Dialogue Program on religion, extremism, and women in 2003 by the late King Abdullah Al-Saud. The open National Dialogue has led to many reforms that afforded women new opportunities and more participation into the public sphere. Major leaps in the development of Saudi women's status include: allowing women to obtain commercial licences in 2005, launching King Abdullah's Scholarship Abroad Program for male and female students in 2005, assigning the first Saudi woman minister in 2009, permitting women to work in mixed environments as salespersons and cashiers in 2011, appointing 30 Saudi women to the *Monarchy's Advisory Body* in 2013, and allowing women to vote/run for municipal councils in 2015 (Moaddel, 2006).

Reform continued under the patronage of the current King Salman and his son Deputy Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS). In addition to ongoing campaigns to abolish women's driving ban, the guardianship rule has been challenged by human rights activists and the Human Rights Watch since 2009 and many modifications put limits to its power, e.g. women were allowed in 2013 to register births and deaths and obtain family cards to be able to perform certain legal actions related to their children, and in 2017 their access to education and healthcare services were granted without permission of a guardian (Human Rights Watch, 2016). On September 26, 2017, King Salman announced that women were decreed able to drive in the country starting from June 24, 2018. This is part of MBS's proposed '2030 vision' project to expand the nation's economy beyond the oil industry and eradicate religious extremism. MBS has called for bringing the post-*Sahwa* era to an end.

Therefore, 'change' has manifested in government-initiated opportunities that allow women more visibility in the public sphere. These initiatives resulted from a shift in the demographics of the country with increased female literacy rates and employment opportunities, which mandated a need to accommodate a new generation of Saudi women who refuse to be confined by traditional roles and social boundaries (Al-Fassi, 2010; Yamani, 2000). This, however, spurred various national struggles between those who welcomed change and those who resisted it, for instance between the conservatives and the liberals (Moaddel, 2006). It follows that the scene was set for diverse responses ranging from acceptance, resistance, or complete rejection for religious, cultural, and political reasons.

Still, women working in gender-mixed environments are often subjected to the criticism of conservatives as immoral. They are officially not allowed to apply for or renew their national id or passport, travel, or get married without the permission of their male guardians. Nowadays, the religious establishment is undergoing scrutiny, particularly online, and the immunity of its scholars is partially removed. Its strictness is often referred to as 'radical' or 'extremist'. Hence, it has become clear that institutionalisation of discriminating practices limit women's access to and participation in the public sphere, which contributed to their publicised victimisation. Yet, with the lack of organised efforts to changing women's situation, the women's daily struggles remained marginal. This is described in this thesis as 'the status quo'.

In the context of this research, gender inequality revolves around three notions: 1) men have more freedom, better opportunities, and a higher social status; 2) men control the direction of their relationships in that they have the upper hand within households in terms of matters of money, living conditions, marriage, and divorce; 3) men occupy positions with religious, political, economic, legal, and cultural power (AlSaleh, 2012). To compare, gender equality is 'the absence of discrimination' according to *the World Health Organisation (WHO)*. It is the equal treatment of men and women in laws and policies as well as equal access to knowledge, resources, and services within families, communities, and society at large (*The WHO gender policy*, 2002). Gender equity, on the other hand, refers to "the fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men" and the necessity to address their different needs and positions in a manner that rectifies any imbalance (Tschirhat, 2014).

Saudi women have their own understanding of equality out of the perception of their pre-eminent role inside and outside their households. Tschirhat (2014) points to the emergence of Saudi-Islamic Feminism by analysing the Saudi blogosphere using a critical discursive analysis. Three themes have emerged in how women negotiate identity and gender tensions that depart from Western traditions: defence of faith, call for a repositioning of the *Ulema* (Islamic scholars), and a restoring Saudi history. Compared to Western feminist and post-feminist discourse on women, Arab women reject the affiliation to the nomenclature of 'feminism' because of its liberal Western connotations and political associations. What Arab and Saudi women seek, then, is gender equity, not equality, due to religious and cultural forces at play in the region (ibid).

Despite the recent advances, the deeply-rooted gendered judgements and assumptions that permeate Saudi media, culture, and political institutions slow the process of emancipating Saudi women. The popularisation of new media platforms has allowed men and women a mutual public space, with their choice of authentic or pseudonymic names, where they can communicate together to address issues pertaining to their lives as well as have access to more in-depth characterisation of each other. This is how SM, amongst which the most popular is Twitter, could accelerate change in the terrain of traditional practices in SA, including the global outreach of the travel ban campaigns, and low marriage rates for Saudi women. Therefore, it is a suitable place to capture such debates surrounding the status quo and change.

## **2.2 Twitter's social-transformative potential in SA**

Internal power struggles in SA, including those between the genders, have found in the *World Wide Web* (WWW) an outlet for expression and negotiation of meanings. When the internet was introduced in the 1990s, its arrival was met with cultural, religious, and political concerns in fear of the arrival of undesirable material into the conservative Saudi households. This scepticism led to the provision of a tailored version to the Saudi public via a huge filter system set up in *King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology* (KACST) in Riyadh (Al-Saggaf and Begg, 2004). Because of this pervasive centralised internet censorship and strict penalties for certain political, social, or religious speech on certain topics, the Saudi internet usage received a 'not free' status with a score of 72/100 on the *Freedom on the Net 2016 Report* (Freedom House, 2016). Initially, this censorship forced restrictions on access to certain types of content, but not to communication between people, i.e. via social networking sites, which explains their high penetration among the Saudis.

The importance of Twitter to the present study of a social phenomenon like gender relations in the context of conservative SA stems from three sources. First, it has been suggested that Twitter creates a discursive space where Saudi men and women could debate gender-related issues without being stigmatised (AlRasheed, 2013; Chaudhry, 2014). According to statistics published online by *Statista* ranked Twitter as 4<sup>th</sup> most popular social network in SA as of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2017. These figures point to the rapid expansion of SM use in SA and that women contribute largely to that expansion. SM platforms have changed the way young Saudis interact with each other. Still, amid rising

tensions with Iran and the ongoing war in Yemen, which is placing an extra financial burden on the country, Saudi authorities have become on high alert in monitoring public expressions of dissent. SM expression is now repressed via institutionalised laws as anti-terrorism and cybercrimes. Even non-activist every-day users of SM nowadays are aware of this authoritarian presence online as they post their messages (Freedom House, 2016). However, many have become so creative that they have learned to bypass technological censorship using circumvention tools and avoid persecution through such strategies as opening topics for deliberation and humour.

Site administrators and gatekeepers often delete inappropriate or controversial tweets generated by users to prevent any legal liability, but the case was different on Twitter with the absence of gatekeepers/administrators. Self-censorship developed from the users' awareness of such limitations causing them to refrain from bluntly supporting extremism, expressing liberalist ideals, calling for political reform, exposing human rights violations or questioning religious beliefs (ibid). Instead, the Saudis have taken to Twitter to expose corruption, debate sensitive national issues, engaging in cautious, rather than blunt, criticism. They often do so through hashtags to inspire national participation on such debates.

The third SM report released by the Dubai School of Government (Mourtada and Salem, 2011) quantitatively investigated the role of SM in Arab women's empowerment and engagement, while also trying to better understand the gender gap that continues to exist online between males and females in the ME. The survey's most important finding is that there is a shared view that SM can be considered a tool for women's empowerment because it provides them opportunities for self-expression, not available to them offline. For that reason, SM sites, particularly the microblogging system (Twitter), have increasingly attracted the Saudis (ibid:9). In the 'use of social media to share opinions' and to 'participate in civic and political activities', SA showed a relatively higher than average response compared to the regional level, i.e. the GCC countries (ibid:6). It can be argued that Saudi women use SM to spread awareness of their issues against dated laws without being heavily censored (ibid:5).

The government continues monitoring the platform to control unwanted critical conversations, manufacture consent for its policies, or simply survey reactions to new policies under consideration. Several Twitter users, known as 'tweeps', were detained for writing about contentious aspects of religious doctrines or the monarchy (Freedom House,

2016). In 2012, the Ministry of Interior launched a new web-based tool for users of SM to report any offensive comments made about the government, religion, or individuals. As a result, the anonymity of users was undermined by new registration requirements to associate every mobile SIM card to its owner's real name and fingerprints to protect national security and maintain social order. The surveillance led the Saudis to revise their strategies and devise more creative forms of protest and critique.

Second, Twitter facilitates the discussion of a topic and allows tweeps to gain 'attention' and 'visibility' through attaching the hashtag sign (#) (Page, 2012a). A hashtag is a form of linguistic innovation (Cunha et al., 2011) where any tweets containing the keywords that follow it are aggregated into one streamline. These keywords are searchable, and the symbol may be employed by people who seek visibility and reach wider audiences, for both their person, commodity, and content (Page, 2012a; Zappavigna, 2012). Hashtags are user-created and may create 'a hybrid forum' (Burgess, 2014) that hosts discussions or a 'polyphonic backchannel' for multiple voices surrounding a topic, event, or occasion (Puschmann, 2015:30) that mirror the opinions, interests, and values of a society (Cunha et al., 2012). Two topics were selected in the context of this research based on the premise that hashtag debates form 'a sort of social meta-data' reflecting a dominant discourse/stance and other counter discourses/stances among an 'affective' hashtag public (Papacharissi, 2015). They can illustrate how users negotiate social meanings/roles, argue, persuade, express feelings, offer reasons, or celebrate vs. criticise status quo/change. It follows that the rise of SM sites could lead to changing power relations in line with claims about the social-transformative potential of SM (e.g. Eickelman, 2003).

Third, Twitter has demonstrated its power in mobilising citizens and promoting social change due to its role during the risings of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt (Lotan et al., 2011). Therefore, governments have felt the need to monitor and regulate people's activities on Twitter and a ban from engaging with material that contradicts the Islamic way (*Shariah*) or compromise the country's security was issued in 2012 (Chaudhry, 2014). There are harsh laws and penalties on cases of defamation associated with a series of governmental warnings directed at online speech. Another aftermath of the uprisings is that Saudis engaged in intensified cyber debates on Twitter and Facebook, which contributed to polarising the Saudi society into an internal divide between those who enjoy the openness of SM and those who wish it would be restricted.



While to AlRasheed (2013:28) Twitter is a contested space for internal protest and power struggles in the country, including gender power relations, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Sheikh, the Grand Mufti of SA, made the comment, on his Fatwa television show in 2013, that Twitter is “the source of all evil and devastation” and that tweeps were using it “to promote lies, backbite and gossip and to slander Islam” as well as for trivial matters which are not of the high morals that Muslims should live by. Public religious authorities continued to caution citizens against the ‘evils’ of SM but this *fatwa* was motivated by an uproar over a number of defamation cases leading to the criticism of Twitter as the ‘council of clowns’ where people unleash inappropriate and indecent tweets (Freedom House, 2016). Not only do Saudis’ contributions to Twitter come at significant rates, but this is institutionally recognised because King Salman has also signed up to Twitter in 2015, which makes him the first Saudi king to use SM for public address (Jones and Omran, 2015). Furthermore, 93 Saudi governmental authorities have also open public accounts on Twitter to foster transparency with the citizens (Alasem, 2015).

Beside its political and social mobilising effect, Twitter has also helped advance Arab feminist voices and movements significantly (Khamis, 2014). While there are continued restrictions, online and offline, technological, cultural, or religious, it may be concluded that there are opportunities and affordances provided by Twitter as an online forum, i.e. gender mixing, anonymity, flexibility of online identities, and global reach for local issues. The potential it offers combined with the uniqueness and complexity of Saudi women’s struggles for their rights, as will be revealed in the analysis of this thesis, is not limited to tangible changes. The campaigns that were popularised with the help of Twitter hashtags, e.g. #Women2Drive from 2011 and #Oct26Driving from 2013, have allowed women to attract the attention of fellow Saudis and Western media as well as helped place established gender roles, and relationships and received ways of thinking under public scrutiny. This is a field of study that has drawn attention recently (e.g. Almahmoud, 2015; Altoaimy, 2017; Sahly, 2016, c.f. Section 3.2.5) and may have contributed to preparing the Saudi society for lifting the ban in September, 2017. The next section focuses on how the Saudis have taken to hashtags to initiate change while debating issues pertaining to women, perhaps in recognition of the platform’s transformative potential.

### 2.3 The uptake of hashtags as an interdiscursive space in SA

Against the socio-cultural situation of Saudi women described above, Saudi men and women are equally provided several technological features by Twitter, such as hashtags and mentions (previously called favourites) and these online communication practices are strategically – and creatively – being employed as discursive markers of social structure, relationships and identity. Of interest in the Saudi Twitter-sphere is the prominent use of hashtags as forums for the discussion of Saudi women-related issues. This claim was made based on a survey of the hashtags that were available during the data-collection phase of this research showed in June, 2015, which will be detailed in Section 4.2.

An observation of how hashtags were used among the Saudis shows that Tag/topical hashtags (Shapp, 2014; Page, 2012a; Zappavigna, 2011) have particularly been utilised for various purposes. Topical hashtags can be analysed in terms of what communicative meta-functions they enact in discourse (Zappavigna, 2015; c.f. Section 3.2.4.3). Based on the semantic domain of the topics, many hashtags were found to be related to women's issues. They represent middle-range topics such as '#قيادة\_المرأة\_السعودية' (the Arabic equivalent of #Women2Drive). The English version of this hashtag has been repeatedly used across social-networking platforms for online campaigns that it has become a label in conjunction with offline activism promoting women's driving. The debate on women's driving ban has become symbolic of Saudi women's rights (Almahmoud, 2015). Another social human-rights campaign worth mentioning is the ongoing '#سعوديات\_نطلب\_إسقاط\_الولاية\_600' since 2016 (and its twin English hashtag #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen), to call for lifting the guardianship law imposed on Saudi women with the number on the Arabic hashtag marking the days since it started.

Some hashtags aggregated public reactions to certain news, e.g. '#ضوابط\_سفر\_المرأة\_السعودية' (#NewTravelControlsForSaudiWomen) and its twin, less popular, hashtag '#إصدار\_جواز\_بدون\_إذن\_ولي\_الأمر' (#IssuingPassportWithoutPermission) were triggered by news about amendments made to rules regarding women's travel. Another hashtag '#ثلث\_السعوديات\_عوانس' (#OneThirdOfSaudiWomenAre9anises) marks the public reaction to the publicised interpretation of a statistic about the general number of unmarried Saudis to mean women only. Many hashtags were not just reactionary, but also historicising, e.g. '#صوتك\_يفرق' (#YourVoiceCanMakeADifference) was launched to mark the historical moments when Saudi women were first allowed to run and vote in municipal elections in 2015 in which women were sharing images and positive sentiments

to encourage other women to support the social change. Most recently, the hashtag ‘#سوقي\_كلنا\_معاك’ (#DriveWeAllStandByYou) was started early June, 2018 to encourage women to practice their right and drive, a few days before the date announced for the historical event of lifting the ban, i.e. June 24, 2018.

Like other Twitter users, Saudis engage in conversations and express their views on hashtags (AlRasheed, 2013; Chaudhry, 2014) and so form virtual ad-hoc circles or ‘hashtag publics’ (Bruns and Burgess, 2011). Contributing to these listed hashtags is a form of identity work that reveals stance taking and ideological positioning; they create a community of tweeps who post to express their stance, whether it is traditional or subversive, and continue to experiment with more functions for hashtags. In some of the above-mentioned hashtags, contributors are observed tweeting in English or switching to it and the hashtag wording itself may have an English equivalent to propagate it globally and ask for support as in the case of *#women2drive* (Almahmoud, 2015; Chaudhry, 2014). It is noticeable thus far, that the practice of capitalising the first letter of each word in English in hashtag formation is replaced by adding underscores ( \_ ) to separate words in Arabic hashtags longer than a word.

To sum up, Saudi women are situated within a social order that is characterised by male dominance and gender segregation and dictated by a combined formulation of religion and culture. This situation is currently undergoing revision and reform making change a highly debated issue around which social actors are divided. This is expected to be reflected online as Twitter, with its affordances and oft-popularised transformative potential, has displayed a special social significance as a discursive space appropriate for the gender-segregated situation in SA. How tweeps position themselves against the status quo and/or social change within debates relating to women’s issues is the main concern in the present thesis. An appreciation of the Saudi context and the transformative potential of Twitter within it is, thus, a prerequisite for a better understanding of context-specific concepts and constructions of gender identity and relations from a CDA lens, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 3: Conceptual and theoretical framework**

The present research seeks an in-depth understanding of how gendered discourses on Twitter, exemplified and aggregated by selected topical hashtags about women's issues, may be instrumental in unravelling the various gender identities, social roles, and relationships constructed in the SA society and how tweeps position themselves against them. It is situated in interpretive theory-based critical linguistics (Post-structuralism and CDA) in its analysis of gender and computer-mediated discourse (CMD). Because it draws on the dynamic interaction between gender, discourse, and online communication, it relies on various theoretical constructs and perspectives to inform the understanding and interpretation of data in this research. Therefore, the conceptual framework is explained regarding the notion of discourse and society constituting the basic premise of this thesis and CDA as the guiding analytical approach. The chapter proceeds to provide a literature review of previous studies to demonstrate how gender has been approached and how gendered hierarchies are reflected offline, with a focus on gendered discourses from post-structuralist and CDA perspectives, and online, in English and in Arabic. Due to its central relevance to the current thesis, Section 3.2.4 is devoted to relevant literature written on Twitter and its communicative functionality followed by a section on relevant studies on Twitter in SA. The chapter concludes with a summary of key issues and research gaps before presenting the RQs.

### **3.1 Conceptual framework**

#### **3.1.1 Language and society**

Sociolinguists' focus on diversity of speech and production in line with de Certeau's proposition of 'multilocations' in cultural studies and what he calls the 'science of singularity' (de Certeau, [1980]1984:ix). This theory is characterised by the heterogeneity of the human subjects and the multiplicity of cultural references through which they construct itineraries and associations (ibid). De Certeau's theory of classifying power relations in a society into 'strategies' and 'tactics' made its way from policymaking to linguistics. Institutions employ and conceal 'strategies' to structure and maintain operations of power that keep ordinary people in check, but the latter respond with 'tactics' that allow them moments of agency and resistance within that social order.

Accordingly, ordinary subjects bend pre-existing linguistic systems to their purposes while simultaneously being bounded by their laws. Over time, the cultural interplay between them results in a reconfiguration of cultural practices, values, and beliefs.

This theory is consistent with the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1992), one of the most important theorists of discourse in the twentieth century whose ideas align with interactionist and post-structuralist approaches to meaning and discourse (Robinson, 2011). While these approaches emphasise the agency of speakers and their individual production of meaning, Bakhtin (1992) stresses the self-altering effect of what he calls dialogism, i.e. language speakers' orientation to the other. He distinguished between 'single-voiced discourse' (monologic), i.e. speech expressed in a straightforward manner oriented towards referential meaning, 'multi-voiced discourse' (dialogic/polyphony), where a diversity of opinions and voices are in dialectal relationship each acknowledging the other, and 'double-voiced discourse' when the speakers clearly quote or report or appropriate another's speech/style or tailor their messages to accommodate another's views and concerns for a desired outcome (Bakhtin 1994 [1963]). This 'self-other orientation' can be intended to guard oneself against criticism or to avoid conflict especially when feeling insecure or under scrutiny, to associate oneself with an admired another or disassociate by mockery (Baxter, 2011). Polyphony is taken as a given in the present thesis based on the assumption that discourse reflects the different voices present in a society (Bakhtin, 1992).

As is the case in the Saudi society, the diversity of voices has been silenced by a dominant discourse that shuts down on confrontational voices of difference or protest. Dialogism subtly protests this closure and opposes the fixed monologism of that hegemonic discourse. Truth does not reside in a single meaning to be found in the world; it does in a vast multitude of contesting meanings. Bakhtin's (1992) approach resulted in a change in the social role that linguistics plays, which he calls 'meta-' or 'translinguistics', studying dialogical interaction and discourse while oriented towards social functions of language.

These theories point to the idea that 'culture' has become something that people 'do', besides being a noun that designates the substantive, perhaps confining, aspects of a social reality (Jones, 2013:237-9). Culture is being 'verbed' as a corrective measure to systems of discrimination fostered by perpetuating discourses of injustices (ibid). Still, even as a socially-constructed entity, culture draws its categories based on the difference between

ingroups and outgroups as people continue to engage in ‘othering’ to make sense of their world. Emphasis on difference has been employed by certain social structures as a tool to create ‘disadvantage’ resulting in hierarchal, binary oppositions, e.g. male/female; native/alien, that encode some value judgement. In the Saudi context, this ‘othering’ of women resulted in their concealment and marginalisation from the public sphere for decades.

Overall, from a post-structuralist perspective, difference, ‘otherness’, and multiplicity are embraced, liberated from the limitations imposed by binary oppositions. Difference is understood as a site for dialogue in authentic exchanges, without boundaries, especially in a post-modern era of globalisation and technological developments in digital media platforms, which have blurred most binarisms. Embracing difference, or diversity, becomes a tool for liberation or enforcing social change (ibid:241). Therefore, cultural categories and values are drawn upon and renegotiated by language users in the enactment of their own identities.

### **3.1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis**

This research supports a multi-layered socio-constructivist view of discourse as a social practice reflecting the attitudes and value systems of people and employed by them to promote a certain version of reality or ideology (Burr, 1995:2). Ideology is never neutral and may create and polarise social groups (ibid; Kramsch, 1998). Therefore, discourse is both socially constitutive and constituted, and this applies to gender hierarchies as well (Fairclough, 1995:131). This ‘discourse theory’ approach aims to emancipate disadvantaged social groups by denaturalising dominant social structures that are responsible for inequality (Baker, 2014). It does so by critically examining how gender, which is a social construct, dynamically interacts with other identity categories and social practices. It is ‘critical’ in that it questions how language reflects, creates, or challenges influential societal norms and stereotypes in the making of masculine and feminine identities (Butler, 1990).

To analyse the perspectives and resources that hashtag contributors adopt to deliberate the gendered issues at hand, this study draws on the interdisciplinarity of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) both as a context-sensitive theoretical framework and a method. As the conceptual framework that relates language to its socio-political context, it has evolved from Critical Linguistics (CL) to be very influential in academic research

across disciplines. It investigates how discourse is used to construct and maintain social identity and power relationships by re-contextualising them socio-politically/culturally. As a heterogeneous school of discourse analysis, the CDA frameworks that have helped shape the analysis in this thesis are: the socio-cognitive approach (SCA) of van Dijk (1997, 2006), the discourse-historical approach (DHA) of Wodak and Reisigl (2001, 2009), the social action approach (SAA) of van Leeuwen (2006, 2008), and Sunderland's (2004) naming and identification of gendered discourses approach.

Before delving into these frameworks, key aspects of CDA ought to be expounded. First, CDA is 'critical' because it attempts to uncover hidden connections, i.e. ideologies, views, and beliefs (Fairclough, 1995; Widdowson, 2000) and to demystify ideologies and power relations (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:3). It explicates how linguistic features of texts, political and media, on a micro-level propagate a certain worldview as common sense on a macro-level (van Dijk, 1998). It aims to empower polarised, disadvantaged groups to resist hegemonic practices by exposing prevailing patterns in texts for deliberation and scrutiny. For example, linguists and non-linguists have exploited CDA in studies of gender politics to denaturalise dominant discourses and the resulting social practices that marginalise women and to reveal absences as well as taken-for-granted assumptions.

Second, power may be exercised through force, or the possibility of it, consent, or discourse, and the latter is the focus of CDA studies. In addition to denoting any stretch of text beyond the level of a clause, the term 'discourse' in CDA has two other senses relevant here. As an abstract noun, it is language in use, or a form of social practice, which focuses on the social actions for which language, as a possible 'mediational means', is used to perform (Fairclough, 1995; Jones, 2010:472; Scollon, 2001). As a concrete count noun, it is a way of relating experience from a certain perspective, e.g. male vs. female perspectives (Fairclough, 1995:135; Cameron, 2001:123). The latter is differentiated from the former meaning of discourse with a capital 'D'. Gee (1996:127) defined these 'Discourses' or systems of knowledge as "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and so on". 'Small d discourses', which allow speakers of a language to perform actions in the world, exist within 'capital D Discourses', in turn determining what cultural affordances and constraints control what those speakers do or say.

Two other sets of terms, which are found in the field to describe power relationships in discourse, correspond with these 'small d discourses' and 'capital D Discourses'

respectively: Fairclough's (2001:36-46) 'power in discourse' and 'power behind discourse', or Fairclough's (1995) 'social discourses' and 'orders of discourse'. 'Power in discourse' focuses on analysing discourse as a form of social practice where power relations and subject positions are found/created between participants in a situation, implicit or explicit. Conversely, 'power behind discourse' is the hidden power or shared ideology that holds the whole social order of discourse together. In other words, 'power in discourse' is situational, whereas 'power behind discourse' is institutional/social/cultural (Fairclough, 2001).

Like gender, power, too, is a multi-layered complex concept that is 'a socially-constructed' reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1976). Hence, it is important here to mention the various forms of the practice of power based on difference or asymmetry. Power relations may take the form of authority, domination, hegemony, or solidarity. A person is said to have 'authority' over another if there is an agreed or a natural position that legitimises power. 'Domination' or 'dominance' is power embedded in the institutions of a society, framing an asymmetrical relationship where social control is exercised over a group of people (Foucault, 1988:12; van Dijk, 1993:249-50). 'Hegemony', on the other hand, is more implicit because a group gains power consensus over another by means of consent or persuasion (Talbot, 2003:2). It relates to a group's ability to control certain orders of discourse and shape discursive practices, i.e. Bourdieu's (1992) 'symbolic power' such as that of media discourse (Fairclough, 1995:95). Symbolic power is the control of public discourses and communication, e.g. access to knowledge and information, media, or structure of discourse (Balfaqeeh, 2007). Unlike authority, hegemony, and domination, 'solidarity' is based on similarities and can exist between equal individuals, powerful or not. Expressing strong solidarity is itself an expression of power on the part of the speaker (Balfaqeeh, 2007).

Whenever a power imbalance is identified, there is resistance. Conversely, where there is resistance, there must be some power dynamic or control in operation in that context. Power is, thus, a dynamic, transformative ability to influence the course of events, whether 'enabling' or 'repressive' (Mey, 1998:695). For Foucault (1988:220), it is manifested as "strategic games between liberties, dominations, and governments". Dominant social practices, i.e. 'socially regulated ways of doing things', are often goal-oriented, purposefully regimented, homogenised, and regulated by those in power, tradition, religion, or the influence of experts, role models, or technologies (van Leeuwen,



2008:7-8). Therefore, texts should be studied as both representations and interactions corresponding to the difference between ‘talking about it’, and ‘doing it’ (van Leeuwen, 2008). It enables the interpretation of how power relations affect or are affected by discourse by explaining the processes by which a discursive pattern becomes a social or a naturalised common-sense practice (van Dijk, 1998; van Leeuwen, 2008).

Within the CDA framework, written and spoken discourses (texts) are said to be sanctioned by the cultural conventions (discourse practices/small d discourse/power in discourse) cultivated by a certain discourse community (order of discourse/capital D Discourses/power behind discourse) (Fairclough, 1995; Kramsch, 1998:3-6). This is based on the CDA principle that discourses are mutually constitutive and constituted in the sense that they could sustain social status quo or transform it (Foucault, 1977). The various possible ways social practices can be presented, evaluated, legitimised, justified, or ascribed purposes, result in the ‘plurality of discourses’ (van Leeuwen, 2008). This makes representations valuable to a critical analysis like the present one.

Early CDA approaches to power imbalances generally relied on certain linguistic phenomena as conscious linguistic choices or unconscious discursive traces. However, this reliance recently shifted to focus on goal-oriented discursive strategies that, consciously or unconsciously, employ these linguistic choices and rhetorical tropes for the pursuit, maintenance, or disruption of hierarchies (e.g. Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). These markers were interpreted and explained variably within the different schools of CDA to make asymmetrical power relationships explicit (Baker, 2014; Baxter, 2003, 2010).

Therefore, in a creative re/production of ‘small d discourses’, ‘capital D Discourses’ may be appropriated, combined, or transformed. They could reframe social activities, create unanticipated possibilities of actions, and identities, and/or contest traditional Discourse systems by introducing novel ways of seeing reality. ‘The imaginaries projected in discourses’ may result in a wide social change when discourses penetrate different genres and interactions as ‘ways of being’ and materialise in the physical world (Fairclough, 2005:67). It is essential, though, to point to the paradox that research may help reiterate socially-determined discourses and stereotypes about men and women and thus unintentionally justify the privileging of men (Talbot, 2010). This is specially the case because ‘power’ is often spoken of in gender studies in terms of ‘dominance’, ‘victimisation’, ‘patriarchy’, ‘silencing’, which are similarly reiterative.

Inequality is often associated with issues of ‘voice’, which, according to Blommaert (2005:69), is ‘the capacity for semiotic mobility’ and with ‘orders of indexicality’ assigned to various discourses in national and international contexts of language use. Despite such inequalities and constraints, language users retain an agency illustrated by the creative and subversive processes of text production since they may edit, add, and montage different ideological and narrative meanings for various effects (Bucholtz, 1999; De Certeau, [1980]1984; Wodak and Meyer, 2009; van Leeuwen, 2008). By selecting a certain level of indexicality and historicity to support one’s position, discourse producers perform an act of power (Blommaert, 2005:110). Since injustices are produced, legitimised, and resisted by language, texts have become ‘sites of struggle’ for dominance, where ‘traces’ of differing discourses and ideologies can be found to index power (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:10).

Therefore, discursive gender identity, subject positioning, and power relations, which constitute continua-sociocultural constructs, need to be denaturalised and studied in conjunction with other categories like age, class, status, culture, social roles, and genres, summing up findings based on previous research in the field (Talbot, 2010:46-7). A social role is ‘a regulatory pattern of externally visible actions’ that involves the ‘emotions and attitudes’ that are associated with these actions, and the power relations between participants. These social roles may be activated or passivated (van Leeuwen, 2008). The level of genders’ participation in public or private discourses as well as what they have access to and what is expected of them need to be considered. This is in line with post-structuralist perspectives and Butler’s (1990) socio-constructivist view that to subvert certain social constructions or practices in a certain context, resistant voices must draw on the shared discourses and social structures that shaped them while abiding to their rules. These discourses constitute part of what is called ‘shared knowledge’ in van Dijk’s (2006) socio-cognitive approach.

CDA is deeply-seated in ideology and identity formation in interactions. The term ‘ideology’ was created to originally and neutrally denote a study of these ‘ideas’. It has gained negative connotations as a set of rigid prejudiced ideas for its utility for hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) or symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1992), but it is not merely the property of the powerful because there are resistant or oppositional ideologies (Hodge and Kress, 1988), which has value from the perspective of the people who use them. According to Wodak and Meyer (2009:9), ideologies are ‘coherent and relatively stable sets of beliefs

or values' which are formed through their (re)production in texts, connected to each other, to maintain certain power imbalances or hegemonies. Hegemonies are, thus, relatively stable and pervasive systems of ideologies supported by traditional, religious, institutional, or private social practices.

Van Dijk's (2006) multidisciplinary socio-cognitive model views ideologies as basic resources from which members of a community draw and activate as necessary to achieve intragroup cohesion or to regulate intergroup relations, those of inclusion, exclusion, or polarisation. Hence, ideologies become political in a social field whenever opposed groups struggle over power and one group's interests are at stake. Stereotypes, for example, are symbols 'propagated' by ideologically-driven 'sign-makers' to influence both the people who use them and those they characterise, e.g. stereotypes related to gender, religious, or ethnic groups (Fairclough, 1995:22).

The socio-cognitive model provides a systematic way to discover ideologically-variable structures in texts because underlying ideological structures involve polarisation, show in attitudes, racist or sexist for example, and in the mental models of individuals which in turn control discursive choices that project a polarised worldview. Van Dijk (2006) suggests 'the ideological square' that involves the application of four strategies on the levels of social practice, meaning, and structure. These strategies are: emphasising ingroup good things, emphasise outgroup bad things, de-emphasise ingroup bad things, and de-emphasise outgroup good things (van Dijk, 2006:734). The main semantic discursive strategies, hence, are 'positive self-representation' and 'negative-other-representation', both of which are linked to 'polarisation' of ingroup vs. outgroup ideologies, or US-THEM.

If members of a social group speak highly of themselves, actions, norms, and values, while downgrading the 'other', there is some ideological work going on. The same applies to meaning and argumentation to persuasively defend them. These macro-strategies are manifested by discursive moves, or categories of ideological discourse, e.g. actor description/reference, categorisation, generalisation, comparison, euphemism, evidentiality, example, hyperbole, implication, irony, metaphor, polarisation, presupposition, vagueness, victimisation, and topos of various types, e.g. burden, number game, authority, etc. while analysing persuasive or manipulative discursive justifications and legitimations, topoi (plural for topos) are argumentation schemes or standard arguments that are presented sufficient reasons to accept a conclusion and they can be

revealing of taken-for-granted premises in a community (Kwon et al., 2014:271). They contain conclusion rules in condensed form ‘if p, then q’ or If x, then y and y because x (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

This thesis adopts a comprehensive view that sees ideologies as subjective, relatively stable, and not always explicit. Within power struggles, ideologies are activated in terms of inclusion/exclusion, positive-self presentation/negative-other presentation, US/Them, and polarisation on the level of meaning/discourse. Yet, at times of conflict, domination, or resistance, ideological debates ensue to explain why discrimination occurs which makes ideologies explicit and people become aware of their operation, e.g. sexist ideology.

Furthermore, what people infer from a text, as presuppositions, implications, implicatures, etc., is much more than the text contains, which may lead to misinterpretation, misinformation, and may be manipulated for power control. Van Dijk (2006) insists that cognitive processes in the minds of the writer/speaker and the reader/hearer mediate the dialectic constitutive relationship between knowledge, as well as aspects of context including social structures, participants’ roles, settings, situations, etc., and discourse. These cognitive models lend texts and contexts coherence and facilitate interpretation. There are dominant discourses that make certain forms of knowledge more powerful so that they influence public speech and behaviour whereas there are other less powerful discourses necessary to challenge received ways of thinking and speaking.

## **3.2 Literature review**

### **3.2.1 Gender in written and spoken communication**

Gender is the main theoretical concept for this thesis and is a pervasive research area in social and linguistic studies since the 1970s (Talbot, 2010:20-6). It draws its importance from its influence on who we are, what we are expected to do, and how we are treated in the world; how we talk and how we are talked about (ibid:3). Gender as sex-differentiation can be viewed as “sites of social struggles” (ibid:7). There are two extreme views of the relationship between language and gender. The strong view (language as reproductive) is based on Sapir-Wharf’s deterministic notion that language constructs and is constructed by a socially-shared worldview. The weak version (language as mirror)

views language as a reflection of society and its prevailing gender roles which are in turn reflected in linguistic patterns in usage (ibid:15). This section explores how gender was approached linguistically in Western and Arab cultures and in face-to-face (F2F) communication and digital communications.

Primarily, there is an important distinction drawn in the literature between scholarly studies of ‘language use’ (the language of women/men) and those of ‘language representation’ (language about women/men) (Baker, 2014:158). However, this distinction may be blurred by studies like the present research that have the potential of to inform both. The field of language and gender became a major area of linguistic research following a wave of sociolinguistic social-stratification studies on English speakers between the 1960s and early 1970s, which claimed to have established a difference between the language of men and women. This difference had status-based interpretations suggesting that women, across different social classes, tend to use the standard variety of English more than men (Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1972). Such claims have been criticised because they assume a family structure and male-as-norm ideas and because they were not well supported by later studies (Talbot, 2010:20-6). Other socio-cultural factors also influence the use of the standard or the vernacular varieties of a language than gender (Milroy, 1980; Nichols, 1998).

To show the impact of gender on language use, various sets of linguistic features and preferences in the way men and women talk have been suggested. Early interactional patterns in Western same-sex and cross-sex studies have provided evidence of similar sets of gender-specific features and styles. Various interpretations of how these differences were given based on reductive dichotomies in two power-based theoretical stances: dominance (e.g. Lakoff, 1975; O’Barr and Atkins, 1998) and difference, (e.g. Maltz and Borker, [1982]1998, Tannen, 1984, 1986, 1990).

First, the ‘dominance approach’, espoused by Robin Lakoff’ (1975), rearticulated the traditional view of women’s language as ‘deficient’ and inferior to men’s language. A ‘women’s language’ was characterised by a set of lexical features, e.g. certain vocabulary related to their work and interests, precise colour terms, hesitations, super-polite forms, etc., because, she argued, there is a connection between women and politeness due to their role as ‘preservers of morality and civility’ (Lakoff, 1975:77-99).

Her women’s language features inspired much debate leading to conflicting results (De Francisco, 1991; Holmes, 1984; Holmes, 1986; O’Barr and Atkins, 1998). O’Barr and

Atkins rejected the designation of a 'women's language', suggesting 'powerless language' instead to highlight the social status of speakers who speak that way regardless of their biological sex (O'Barr and Atkins, 1998:385). Hence, Lakoff's theory positioned men and women in an asymmetrical cultural and linguistic world of patriarchy and male privilege, thus, reflecting existing gendered stereotypes and biases (Talbot, 2010:34-8, 41). The dominance approach generally ignored context and other social factors e.g. age, class, education, ethnicity, etc. as well as language individualisation and diversity (Hyde, 2005).

The second theory, the 'difference approach', inspired by research on cross-cultural miscommunication, was first popularised by Tannen (1986, 1990) (Talbot, 2010:99). It explained miscommunication among adults in analogy with miscommunication between ethnic groups. Tannen's cultural approach draws on the notion of the two cultures in intercultural pragmatics to explain gender miscommunication. Since childhood, males and females are claimed to grow in single-sex groups and are 'socialised' into two differing subcultures with different conventions regarding their speech styles, roles, and relationships (Maltz and Borker, [1982] 1998). Within this approach, male and female language are considered equal, but are different in terms of interactional styles, cooperative vs. competitive (Coates, 2004; Tannen, 1984). Tannen (1990) further proposed that men and women have different 'genderlects' to express differing needs, interests, and goals.

Tannen's (1986) work has been dismissed as speculative and anecdotal since her examples were based on fiction. These preferences, however, could be explained differently. Maltz and Borker ([1982]1998:198-9) claim that citing difference as the cause of miscommunication implicates dominance as well because miscommunication in this sense is a prerogative of power. They explain it in terms of conversational goals instead. Binary oppositions characterise the interactional styles of men and women in the difference approach, i.e. report vs. rapport, problem solving vs. problem sharing, oppositional vs. supportive, and informational vs. affective, respectively (Baker, 2014; Talbot, 2010:92-3). Like the dominance approach, this approach seems to have disregarded the interaction between context, gender, and other identity categories as well as trivialised people's experience of dominance (Echkert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992). The two theories were linked in this way and the question of why these linguistic features were focused on and not others remained unsettled.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the distinction between dominance-based and difference-based approaches carried into much of the following research on powerful/powerless communication and language use. Influenced by Lakoff (1975), many empirical investigations on gender-differential use associate powerful language with men and powerless language with women. For example, powerless language was defined as hesitant and tentative, ‘with low ratings of speaker power in experimental research’, while powerful language was characterised by assertiveness, certainty, credibility, and persuasiveness (Grob, Meyers, and Schu, 1997).

The earlier focus on an understanding of gender as a cultural variable or an explanatory factor has shifted in recent advances of gender studies to an understanding of it as a ‘social construct’, motivated by feminist movements (Sunderland, 2004:14-6). In addition, dichotomies like man/woman, masculine/feminine, male/female as well as powerful/powerless have been scrutinised because they ascribe fixed identities to people in a way that allows for no overlap (Baxter, 2010:43). Even though language divides the world into clear-cut categories and imposes boundaries to limit reality, so we could remember it and speak about it, it does not make these categories and the dichotomies resulting from them absolute (Baker, 2014:12). Dichotomies may lead to oversimplification of meanings while ignoring the multi-functionality of language (Talbot, 2010:94-5) and the heterogeneity of human subjects posited by de Certeau ([1980]1984). Multiple cultural references are resources from which people draw to construct their persona.

Feminist linguists rejected both dominance and difference as reductive approaches, where gender is taken as a given (Yates, 2001:23). Although such a distinction was not present in all languages, it was first articulated in English in the early seventies by Oakley (1972) who stated that ‘sex’ is a male/female binary division that is ‘biologically founded’ whereas ‘gender’ is a ‘learned behaviour’ that is ‘socially constructed’ as feminine or masculine (cited in Talbot, 2010:7). Talbot (2010:7-9) problematized the confusion between these two notions in linguistic studies because, by far, no causal link could be empirically established between people’s behaviour and their gender. It has its political consequences as well because research may help reproduce and naturalise socially-determined ideas and can lead to the privileging of men.

Considering the mixed findings and debates engendered in the field of gender studies, the third approach in gender studies that became prominent was the philosophical, socio-

constructionist ‘discourse theory’ of Judith Butler (1990). This approach postulated that gender is ‘performative’, a form of ‘doing’, not ‘being’ and promotes an understanding of it as complex, multiple, multi-layered, shifting, and often contradictory (Baxter, 2010). ‘Doing gender’ is conceptualised as systematic choices on a continuum that speakers make as they enact them (ibid). Coates (1995) raised the important issue of ‘the awkward double bind’ women in public and leadership contexts are caught in to explain their linguistic disadvantageous situation. ‘Male’ and ‘female’ as social categories are not simply descriptive of the biological sex of an individual; rather, they are normative statements that draw the lines on who is included in and who is excluded from these categories. Gendered styles relate not to inherent characteristics, but to culture-specific associations with being male/female. Sex, too, has recently been recognised as a continuum (ibid:13-14). It follows that the social behaviour of people ought to be considered in terms of the interplay between gender and sex within the context of existing social relations (Talbot, 2010).

Butler (1990:179) casts ‘gender’ as a process, a ‘stylised repetition of acts’ that create a relationship between an individual, an audience, and a topic. Gee (2000:9) added that gender is not only an act of doing, but also of ‘being’ since one can ‘be’ recognised as any ‘kind of person’ at a given time and place, which is always shifting from moment to moment and across various interactions. The combined effect is that individuals can modulate their language patterns to position themselves in relation to their interlocutors in terms of gender, not in isolation from other social categories such as authority, class, status, etc. (Cameron, 1997). Individuals have the agency to unlearn, relearn, and resist these normative social orders (Butler, 1990).

Another adequate way of looking at the generalisations about gendered language and their explanations that is relevant to a post-structuralist view of gender is through an understanding of the place of shared linguistic practices (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) suggested that gender should be studied within a certain ‘community of practice’. Ochs (1992:337) conceptualised the relationship between discourse and gender in terms of indexes of social context. Within a certain social context, this relationship is mediated by how discourse is related to stances, social identities (social actors), social acts and actions, and relationships between subjects and/or objects. Social groups have specific ways in which they



organise the distribution of and the value associated with stance and actions across social identities.

Stance is 'a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically...through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field' (Du Bois, 2007:163). An understanding of stance reveals patterns of gendered identity construction and how people position themselves against existing structures because stances are partly acquired habitually in interactions or through socialisation (Bucholtz, 2007; Ochs, 1992). Stance is an (inter)subjective process, and hence, it is considered fluid and emergent, prone to change (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005:591). A stance may be fleeting or more durable but is always prone to change through negotiation and reflection (ibid, 2005).

An 'indexical' may be referential, e.g. pronouns, honorifics, naming, demonstratives, deictic adverbs, and tense, or non-referential or 'context-dependent', including a vast range of morphological, syntactic, and phonological devices (Ochs, 1992:335-9). Three characteristics are suggested for non-referential social indexicals: a) non-exclusive, i.e. inclusive of male and female gender with multiple potential meanings; b) constitutive of pragmatic gender meanings and the projected/expected images of men and women who may alternatively assume the 'voice' of each other; c) temporally transcendent because the constitutive power of an utterance transcends time to past contexts (recontextualisations) and future contexts (precontextualisations), i.e. intertextuality. Referential and non-referential indexes could be used to construct the gender of the hashtag contributors as well as any traces indexing previous or later texts within and across hashtags, Twitter, and the wider context. The present thesis adopts a view of figures engaged in discursive production and recontextualisation as potentially comprising multiple, sometimes contradicting, identities and so are the ideological stances they construct.

The lack of knowledge of these systems (of indexicals) that constitute the cultural/communicative competence of speakers of a language, male and female, often leads to miscommunication (Ochs, 1992). The context-dependent indexicals, thus, have become crucial to contextual inference, reflexivity, and semantic interpretation, which merits increased interest in studying them in recent decades (ibid). It has become important to understand what men and women want to do, what resources they tap on to

do it, and how these resources are distributed in their talk. The same applies to practices and indexes found in hashtagged tweets. To reach plausible interpretations of the tweet texts involved in this study, it was important for the reliability of the results to cross-check the inferences and interpretations made based on context-dependent indexes with other members of the Saudi society.

Another relevant notion to contextual inference and interpretation is Gumperz's (1992) 'contextualisation cues'. A broad definition of contextualisation "comprises all activities by participants which make relevant, maintain, revise, cancel...any aspect of context which, in turn, is responsible for the interpretation of an utterance in its particular locus of occurrence" (Auer, 1992:4). A narrower definition that developed from Gumperz's work focusses on particular cues, i.e. linguistic and non-linguistic that evoke the necessary cultural presuppositions and social expectations and guide the interpretation of what is being said. A 'cue' is an encoded or context-sensitive indicator to nudge an inferential process. It draws on an understanding of context as a set of taken-for-granted propositions in an interaction (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992) and an assumption that context is fluid and that the relationship between context and language is reflexive, i.e. context constructs and is constructed by an utterance (Auer, 1992; Levinson, 2003). Gumperz' work can be useful in identifying the linguistic and paralinguistic strategies that indicate the implicit socio-cultural world in utterances (Ochs, 1992). Linguistic cues include repetition, inclusive/exclusive pronouns, vague references, code/style choice and code/style-switching, and choice of lexical forms, formulaic expressions, or metaphors. Paralinguistic cues include expressing emotions, laughter, potentially by the use of emojis online, posture, gaze, hesitations, pausing, and prosody.

Consequently, 'gendered discourses' are "the sets of attitudes and norms that operate within any organisation that conceptualises gender in hegemonic, male-dominated or gender-divided ways" (Baxter, 2010:15). 'Gender' itself is a social construction that 'carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003:10). Because gender identity is not a universal but a situated social construct (Kimmel, 2000), it needs to be constantly reaffirmed by linguistic and behavioural acts (Butler, 1990). Gendered discourses 'subject position' men and women in different ways in a certain context but they retain the agency to select, take up, or reject these positions. These discourses operate within a regimented order of discourse to produce and sediment more expectations and constraints on the roles and performance of

femininity/masculinity (Baxter, 2010:15). Paradoxically, they legitimate the ‘male/female binary’ in the construction of gender identities (ibid:22). These discourses are infinite, unbounded, and hence, obscure (Sunderland, 2004).

A few scholarly works have thematically identified and named ideological gendered discourses in their attempts to theorise social practices and processes of meaning-making regarding gender, but without providing any linguistic evidence (e.g. Hollway, 1995; Wetherell, Stiven, and Potter, 1987). They highlighted the importance of discursal shifts in pointing to gaps/absences and ‘discursal contradictions’, to conserve or transform existing social orders (Hollway, 1995; Wetherell et al., 1987). For further research, they recommended exploring the discursive potential of gaps/contradictions in fostering the multi-voicedness of texts (Sunderland, 2004:69). Several gendered discourses were identified within Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis, PDA, henceforward (Baxter, 2003; Sunderland, 2004) and CDA frameworks (Lazar, 2005, 2007).

The notion of gendered discourses assumes the socio-constructionist view of gender as a process to which people orient in relation to socially-situated constraints on what they can(not) do and the privileging of discourse as both constituted and constitutive. PDA combines these understandings with an emphasis on whether there are traces of ‘transgression’ in the way gender is performed in empirical studies (Sunderland, 2004:17). Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) developed from PDA to elucidate the complex workings of gender, power, and ideology and how they are produced and reproduced in interactions, because they vary across cultures (Baxter, 2002; Lazar, 2005). It postulates that women adopt multiple, sometimes contradicting, ‘subject positions’, i.e. “spaces for individuals to locate themselves within and define themselves through” (Baxter, 2010:78), which makes it too reductive to homogenise women as victims of male control (Baxter, 2003:10, 2002a).

Lazar (2005, 2007) combined Feminist Linguistics with CDA to form Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to provide a nuanced analysis of hierarchically-gendered discourses that sustain a patriarchal social order which systematically privileges men and disempowers women as social groups. In general, these feminist projects emphasise intertextuality (relations between texts), interdiscursivity (relations between discourses), which may be included under intertextuality (Wodak and Reisigl, 2009), and critical reflexivity. Critical reflexivity encourages researchers to reflect on their theoretical positions and practices in order not to perpetuate potentially ‘damaging’

discourses (Lazar, 2005; Sunderland, 2004). FCDA, therefore, aims to reveal the complex, and sometimes subtle, ways in which taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and power relations are discursively constructed, perpetuated, negotiated, challenged, or transformed in various cultural contexts (Lazar, 2005, 2007). Such an interest acknowledges that the discourses through which social issues are deliberated may result in effecting some sort of social change, which has its implications for marginalised groups, here Saudi women.

Unlike post-structuralist approaches, CDA analysts generally work with emancipatory goals when linguistically approaching texts from a certain political stance which results in producing some sort of a 'grand narrative' that becomes its own pervasive discourse (Baxter, 2002:831). Self-reflexivity is, thus, helpful because it encourages researchers to reflect on their theoretical positions and practices in order not to unintentionally perpetuate 'damaging' discourses (Lazar, 2005; Sunderland, 2004). Using their knowledge of the wider political scene, analysts can draw out claims of significant absences in discourse, which may not be visible to people who do not hold the same political commitment. Failure to recognise differing political forces at work in the data, however, implicitly leads to perpetuating them or telling only part of the story.

The previous discussion raises the questions of whether power distribution may be changed. Castro and Batel (2008:476) suggested that there is a gap within the understanding of the public in their involvement with change between 'norms', or 'prescriptive norms', i.e. prescribing how things should be, and 'practice', or 'descriptive norms', i.e. describing what is. In their examination of how new norms are generalised in a given society, they confirmed 'the agency of social beings', to be involved in reproducing certain social representations or transforming them (Castro and Batel, 2008:478). Discourses are dynamic and can interfere with the social order to slowly, but surely, instigate change, without destabilising that social order. In the 'paradox of change' that Castro and Batel (2008) suggest, a society can accommodate change yet retain a certain degree of stability. This indicates that social change may be subtle. Even when change is made top-down, i.e. by a legal introduction, it does not transform the assumptions and practices related to it (Lima, 2004).

### **3.2.2 Gender studies in the ME**

Despite the political and economic importance of Arabic-speaking countries and the rapid developments, technical and otherwise, that the ME is currently witnessing, limited

published research exists about how Arabic culture and language shape communication practices. There is limited linguistic scholarly work on gender in Arabic. A few of these studies were sociolinguistic whereas the majority were historical, socio-cultural, political, legal, or economic and published in English (e.g. Badran, 1995; Khoury and Moghadam, 1995). Accordingly, Sadiqi (2007:642) argued that “the study of Arabic from a gender perspective is still at its beginning”.

Delayed as they were, early linguistic studies on gender in the Arab world have paralleled the dominant theoretical approaches of Western gender studies. There were difference-based studies aimed at elucidating whether Modern Standard Arabic, MSA henceforth, displayed any gender differences in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq in Schmidt (1974), Kojak (1983), Abdel Jawad (1981 and 1983), and Bakir (1986), respectively. Lakoff's (1975) dominance approach inspired other researchers to focus on gender in their analyses of the different vernacular variations of Arabic in their respective male-dominated societies, Saudi (Al-Mughrabi, 1996), Jordanian (Barhoma, 2002), and Lebanese (Jabbra, 1980). For example, Jabbra (1980) investigated how the Lebanese dialect reproduces the Lebanese predominantly-masculine social structure and concluded that the words referring to categories of women outnumber those of men. Women are defined either with age-specific or marital-status terms. In addition, Lebanese married women are referred to by the names of their husbands or their eldest sons.

Linguistic variation, as such, may be local or regional productions and may take the form of phonetic, morphosyntactic, lexical, or purely stylistic differences in the use of certain discourse strategies, e.g. indirect speech, diminutives, euphemisms, curses or repetition for emphasis (Abu-Haidar, 1988, 1991). Forms of address, naming, as well as proverbs and sayings have drawn attention as reflecting and transmitting underlying cultural and social attitudes, representations, and existing stereotypes about men and women (Abdel Jawad, 1989:312). Particularly, Hachimi (2001) argued that religious sayings constitute a powerful strategy to maintain the status quo of gender relations in stratified societies and in defence of the social, educational, political, and economic segregation of the genders as typical in Arab societies. Based on such studies, it may be concluded that gender power relations in ME were constructed in terms of difference, dominance, and patriarchy and women aimed at asserting their power through such means as oaths, proverbs, quotations from sacred texts, curses, and directness.

The relevance of Western variations to Arabic-speaking societies has been questioned due to important socio-cultural differences that must be taken into consideration, e.g. rural vs. urban backgrounds in either cultures (Al-Mughrabi, 1996; Bassiouney, 2009; Sa'ar, 2007). It was considered difficult to apply the results of a non-diglossic situation, as is the case in most Western societies, to the stable diglossic situation in Arab societies (Vicente, 2009:13). In terms of grammatical structure, the Arabic language differs from most European language in that it is a gender-marked language (ibid). Therefore, it is now understood in Arabic sociolinguistics that the linguistic, pragmatic, and socio-cultural aspects of a context interact with gender, status, and other factors to produce/reproduce the power configurations of that context. The linguistic behaviour of speakers merely based on gender could not be polarised (Al-Wer, 1999).

Sadiqi (2003) and Sa'ar (2007) asserted that the construction of women's speech identity relies on other factors besides gender. As she investigated the language of Moroccan women, Sadiqi (2003) focused on difference and found a correlation between women's sociolect, native tongues, and the private space in postcolonial Morocco. Women empower themselves with such devices as oaths, proverbs, euphemisms and diminutives. Men, however, were often associated with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), French, and the public space. She argued that the linguistic notion of space has changed as women gained more access to the public sphere. Such linguistic changes subsequently contribute to social change. These practices may be described as 'normative' because women view these and similar forms as empowering and gender-neutral (Sa'ar, 2007).

Sa'ar (2007) focused on similarity, not difference, between the two genders' speech in Israel. Women unconsciously and consistently employed grammatical distancing forms, e.g. masculine grammatical pronouns, verb inflections, and self-references in colloquial Arabic and Hebrew, to express personal opinions and emotions. The very 'unmarkedness' of masculine forms is a hegemonic practice, "a mechanism of exclusion/inclusion in the public cultural sphere" (Sa'ar, 2007:408). It reflects a patriarchal society where women occupy a subordinate position and construction of the self is generally collective. Paradoxically, it facilitates the 'silencing' of women because there is an implicit prohibition on the use of female forms for generic talk.

Other works in the ME region focus on women's commitment to the patriarchal family structure for the welfare of their families. So, in keeping with post-structuralist frameworks, it is argued that sexist ideology and the symbolic social power of masculinity

in Arab patriarchal structures have been transferred to Arabic grammar by establishing hierarchies between words, e.g. the use of generic lexical and grammatical forms (Hachimi, 2001, 2007; Sadiqi, 2003). These arguments lead to the same post-structuralist understanding of gender and social identity as cultural constructions of the situated social structure (Barlas, 2002:15). They provide evidence for what Butler (1993) calls ‘paradox of subjectivation’ wherein the subject of subordination becomes an agent in his/her own subordination.

### **3.2.3 Gender and discourse in CMC studies**

As previewed thus far, there were more gender-based differentiation research in early gender studies on the spoken discourse of F2F communication than on the one-to-many written discourse (Argamon, Koppel, Fine, and Shimoni, 2003). Argamon et al. (2003) attributes the shortage of this type of research to the nature of written texts, which are directed to a ‘broad unseen audience’ and lack the ‘intonational, phonological and conversational cues’ of speech. To overcome earlier criticisms of small datasets (Baker, 2014), corpus studies flourished offering large-scale data for gender studies. Furthermore, the introduction of the internet afforded later studies with a valuable resource for public data that is both authentic and numerous (Baker, 2014:203).

This has changed when technology made written data more accessible. Early computational works on gender focused on gender-based analysis of written texts, in concert with earlier difference-based language and gender works, and utilised frequency counts, e.g. Rayson, Leech, and Hodges (1997) and Argamon et al. (2003). They computationally examined gender styles on the British National Corpus’s (BNC) spoken discourse and written texts from a variety of genres, fiction and nonfiction, respectively, reiterating a gender-difference approach to data. Bell, McCarthy and McNamara (2006) statistically compared counts of lexical choices in a relatively small sample of written texts by men and women about marital conflicts and found that the difference was insignificant in using social words and negative or positive emotion words, reiterating the difference approach but pointing to the prevalence of context of social constructionist approaches (ibid:1009).

Where any communication via computers was broadly known as computer-mediated communication (CMC), the term later came to signify text-based online communication, synchronous, or asynchronous (Herring, 2000). Social-Networking Sites (SNSs), also

known as social media (SM), such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc., have become preferred by modern individuals due to the expeditious and economic character of online communications and their ability to help transcend temporal and physical limitations (Felecan and Bughesiu, 2013:520). At least in some cases, its messages are less rigid than F2F communication, characterised by meta-linguistic insertions, overlapping dialogue turns, and lenience in terms of structure (combining different codes, i.e. practical, musical, kinetic, scientific, etc.) and content (mixing letter and non-letter characters, i.e. alphabetical, numeric, punctuating, iconic). These processes trigger inferential and decoding processes on the part of the recipients (ibid:522). SNS have supplied linguistic and social investigations with unprecedented access to enormous naturally-occurring data of various multimodal semiotic forms, whether text, audio, or video. They have also enabled ordinary people to freely disseminate content from the privacy of their households as well as transcend traditional social boundaries by affording them with various tools to creatively articulate their ‘silenced’ or ‘marginalised’ voices or deliberate issues that are absent or underrepresented in mainstream media (Herring and Stoerger, 2014).

CMC data was approached in the 1990s, during the first wave of CMC studies, with a focus on the effects of the medium’s formal features (c.f. Crystal, 2001). Crystal (2001) spoke of a ‘Netspeak’, a type of language with unique formal features arising from the electronic, global, and interactive nature of the medium, e.g. the use of emoticons and acronyms and a style blurring the line between written and spoken discourse. The ‘Netspeak’ myth, nonetheless, has been heavily criticised for its technological determinism and the adoption of a polar distinction between synchronous and asynchronous communication modes, and for failing to account for the social context of language use in CMC (Androutsopoulos, 2006:420).

The purely linguistic and technological deterministic approach of early CMC studies was rejected in the second wave of sociolinguistic CMC studies. The social sciences were reluctant to approach CMC data because it is unrepresentative of the populations who use it, because their demographic characteristics are inaccessible, and, as a discipline, it is not accustomed to computational methods (Borra and Rieder, 2014). Hence, the literature dealing with online spaces was limited and the earliest studies were form-focused (Crystal, 2001). Other studies focused on comparing early CMC platforms, e.g. Facebook and Myspace, with traditional forms of written and spoken communication (e.g. Mayner,



1994; Yates, 1996). The domain of CMC studies continued to expand and investigated new areas of variation in phenomena specific to discourse on CMC, exploring specific structural, linguistic, semantic, stylistic differences conveyed by a choice of one mode or the other (Shapp, 2014).

Online communications are generally not restricted or formalised, rather social and interactive (Yates, 2001:23). Physical cues like age, sex, race, social status, and colour are not always present or easily inferred on CMC and, hence, may be flexibly constructed online (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005; Rodino, 1997). ‘Self-proclaimed’ user characteristics, such as age, gender, etc. were later incorporated (Smith and Balka, 1988; Selfe and Meyer, 1991; Herring, 1992). Scholarly works in this vein focus on the relationship between language and social identity and confirm that hierarchies are often transferred to virtual cyberspace, synchronous and asynchronous. Pioneering this research regarding gender, Herring (1993, 2000, and 2003) explored systematic differences and patterns in male and female participation online. Herring (1993), for example, started by focusing on ‘the democratic theory’ of CMC then demonstrated differences in gender use and access to CMC with data collected from academic discussion lists. She noted two differences in CMC practices of men and women: topic selection, and language style.

Even though interest in CMC is a relatively new trend in sociolinguistics, the literature on gender in cyberspace turned out to be vast and multidisciplinary. In general, researchers who were interested in gender from different academic fields duplicated dominance-oriented and difference-oriented studies on spoken and written interactions, Section, 3.2.1. These studies sought to correlate textual indicators of gender styles with the online personae constructed by users via their username, profile information, and avatars. Later studies discussed varied practices from online role-play games, dating sites, blogging, chat, and email, but their results were conflicting (e.g. Herring and Paolillo, 2006; Thomson and Murachaver, 2001). Thomson and Murachaver (2001) suggested that people use gender-preferential language patterns in electronic discourse such as e-mail and that people trained to identify these patterns can accurately identify the gender of authors. This provided basis for later gender-predictive models of online users (Argamon, Koppel, Pennebaker, and Schler, 2007; Burger, Henderson, Kim, and Zarrella, 2011; Rao, Yarowsky, Shreevats, and Gupta, 2010). Herring and Paolillo (2006) cautioned against extending their results to descriptive generalisations about gender-based linguistic

preferences because these features are common resources available to language users to create personae that are connected to their social identity categories and contextual configurations.

Several linguistic features have been described and quantified as independent variables to explore gender, such as emoticons, unconventional spellings, representations of spoken language features and dialects, obscenity, and code-switching (Baron, 2004; Daina and Herring, 2017; Herring, 2003; Huffaker and Calvert, 2005). Most quantitative studies focused on frequencies and word counts to understand patterns of online linguistic behaviour, e.g. Heragdelen and Baroni (2011), Herring and Paolillo (2006), and Kivran-Swaine, Brody, and Naaman (2013). Yet, there was a disregard to the content of CMC posts prevented an insight to language complexity and to the relationship between discourse structures online and offline, i.e. the power behind discourse as discussed earlier.

The aforementioned studies were criticised for perpetuating difference or dominance discourses and stereotypes in previous sociolinguistic gender studies which overlook diversity of cultural and social contexts. They were contradicted by quantitative gender studies of blogs that controlled for genre to replicate the informational vs. involvement gender association (Herring and Paolillo, 2006) or to score personal information or emotive features, etc. (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005). Topic was also controlled for to score gender-preferential features of postings in discussion lists on gender-stereotypical and gender-neutral topics (Thomson, 2006). They concluded that the addition of other variables can neutralise the effect of gender on the frequency of the word classes within each genre, indicating that gender is only part of larger configurations of personal identity. Rodino (1997) presented evidence that gender identity on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is fluid and that participants dynamically perform their gender in variable ways within situated interaction. This view has its roots with the socio-constructionist theory of Butler (1990:179).

Because of that anonymity and flexibility, CMC has become a frontier where social and linguistic variables enter a dynamic relationship and a greater equality of access and participation was expected. It was suggested that its platforms have an equalising potential because they reduce the effect of social barriers and status differentials and can facilitate social and feminist activism (Crystal, 2001; Khamis, 2014; Graddol and Swann, 1989; Smith and Balka, 1988). This democratising effect has been debated since the 1990s

but was debunked by evidence for online users' disclosure of personal information (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005) and gender-salience (Herring, 1996; Yates, 2001). The anonymity of CMC leads to two phenomena: 'dis-inhibition', a state where a sense of security enables users to diverge from their normal abiding behaviour, and 'de-individuation', a state where the normal behavioural constraints are erased (Jaffe, Lee, Huang, and Oshagan, 1995). However, group members unconsciously tend to adhere to the collectively-accepted norms and behaviours in an online environment to fit in. Hence, in gender-relevant interactions, the salience of the majority gender identity increases, and people tend to 'accommodate' to the gender style of their addressee(s). Herring (1996) demonstrated that minority gender members modify their style in CMC to adapt to the style of the majority gender.

Consequently, the third wave of studies rejected the reductionist approach of viewing gender in terms of binary opposition because the virtual world is so flexible that to speak of formal linguistic patterns is an oversimplification (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005:7). CMC studies since the early 1990s supported the idea that online patterns reflect offline gender disparity and put socialisation, not sex, at the root of that gender behaviour (Herring, 2000). Accordingly, since it is evident that virtual representations of the self normally reflect real gender identities, it may be concluded that users generally 'give off' traces of their gender either in the username or their culturally learned style in the messages (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005; Thomson, 2006). This argument, together with the accommodation theory (homophily), controverts previous claims about the technological medium's potential to neutralise gender.

With emphasis on the discursive interaction of these social parameters with the linguistic form, 'language use in CMC' was replaced by 'computer-mediated discourse', or CMD. Linguistic features in CMD were considered resources from which users draw to construct their online discourses (Herring, 2004). These findings pointed to users' tendency to display culturally-learned gender styles, which seemed to work to the disadvantage of women. When internalised prototypes are activated in mixed-gender interactions, women would show same-sex solidarity and men would start harassing women (Herring, 2000). Consequently, online patterns reflect offline gender disparity and men appear to dominate public discourse on the internet (Hardaker and McGlashan, 2016; Herring, 2000; Huffaker and Calvert, 2005). Socio-cultural approaches to CMC focused on the social and ideological aspects of digitally-mediated interactions and viewed them

as 'social practices' (Barton and Lee, 2013). This approach gave rise to a literature on the multilingual internet (Danet and Herring, 2007), a shift away from English-focused research to code-switching (Adroutsopoulos, 2007), and heteroglossia (Adroutsopoulos, 2011).

CMC studies' early focus on decontextualised online texts and their portrayal of its contexts as 'static', which conceals its dynamic and changing character (Jones, 2004:22-3). Both utopian as well as pessimist views of CMC as equalising or a source of social isolation from offline communities were rejected (ibid). There is evidence for the use of CMC as an extension of real-life interactions to strengthen social relations rather than weakening them (Jones, 2001). Applying F2F and written communication models of context to new media technologies is inadequate because they conceptualise 'interaction' and 'context' in dichotomies terms whereas new media has blurred them, e.g. virtual/material, figure/ground, sender/receiver, text/context (Jones, 2004). New temporal, spatial, and social flexibilities have been introduced that problematised the notion of context (ibid:23). Based on Goffman's (1974) interactional linguistic approach, context may be created by interactants while they communicate. Drawing from his notion of 'framing', digitally-mediated contexts encompass the various ways people enact their 'social presence' and interpret others' enactment of social presence as well as the 'social situation', while different sets of 'mutual monitoring possibilities' are afforded online (Jones, 2004:23).

A user has more control over his 'technological surround' based on the 'communicative possibilities', provided by the affordances of the technological platform, other communication technologies surrounding the individual, e.g. mobiles, pagers, television, as well as those provided by individuals who are co-present physically or non-physically in the interaction. It can also limit an individual's accessibility to other online users, e.g. through the 'block' option, or people who are physically present. Therefore, viewing context as a set of complex layers of 'various realities overlapping and interacting with one another' is better than dividing it into virtual and material (ibid:25). To take this further, online communication may construct the offline context of interactions by extending the possibilities of access to other people, information, objects (ibid).

Unlike offline interactions, part of the fun that users find online is the ability to simultaneously engage in several 'primary involvements'. These multiple interactions make communication in the digital surround 'polyfocal', managed by multiple

‘attentional tracks’ at once, without offending anyone (Jones, 2004:27-8). Attention has thus become a ‘social transaction’ between individuals. Moreover, online users manage to display different levels of presence and monitor other interlocutor’s presence at the same time. This ability alters the traditional conceptualisations of ‘participation’ (participant/non-participant) and ‘presence’ (online/offline), which do not straightforwardly correspond together (ibid:28-9). Hence, the notion of ‘privacy’ has also been altered to mean that a user has more control over who can monitor his/her presence, how to interact and with whom. Such online affordances allow for various degrees of intimacy (ibid:30). Based on these arguments, CMD analysts need to reconsider conventional conceptualisations of context, divert their attention to social identities made possible in online interactions, and ‘adopt a polyfocal perspective’ by experimenting with new methods that start with people’s experiences surrounding the text, not the text itself (ibid:31).

In line with the CDA conceptualisation of discourse as both constituted and constitutive of social reality and its recent focus on strategies, one way of dismantling hegemonic discourses is through what Jones defines as a strategic creativity. In studies of creativity, the focus on language has shifted to discourse, locating creativity in the user of a language who aims to perform something in the world. Strategic ‘creativity’, according to Jones’s (2010) discourse-analytical approach, can possibly change the world by the accumulative effect of transformative practices that shift power relations within immediate interactions and beyond Jones, 2010:473-4). ‘Conventional discourses’ may be used in ‘unconventional’ creative ways to combat constraints imposed by Discourses or cultural systems and transform social norms (Jones, 2010). Because discourse is the ‘recontextualisation of social practice’ (van Leeuwen, 2008), ‘the voice of another’ may be reproduced through various processes, i.e. reporting, translation, narration, quotation, summary, metaphor, or parody, to fit one’s own voice or purpose and pave the way for alternative frames of viewing the world (Jones, 2010:477). On digital media, interdiscursivity as a strategy can effectively aid the proliferation of social activism since the generic nature of intertextuality online enables a wider audience to access and further disseminate a message (Jones, 2015). Studying (creative) interdiscursive links made by speakers/writers about a certain issue can expose the ideologies underlying them and reveal ‘cracks’, discursual contradictions, absences, and gaps in their operation (Jones, 2010:475-7).

Among the most popular of SNSs, Twitter is a microblogging system that has complicated and reworked social concepts across disciplines. Linguistic studies of Twitter data included: the diffusion of lexical items (Squires, 2014); emoticon use (Schnoebelen, 2012), reported speech (Wikstrom, 2014a), and dialectal variation (Russ, 2012). Whereas early studies on Twitter were predominantly concerned with manipulation and management of influential nodes for the diffusion of information measured using machine-learning models (Chang, 2010; Cunha et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2010; Tsur and Rappoport, 2012), more recent studies turned attention to content (Leskovec, Backstrom, and Kleinberg, 2009). Twitter's evolving discourse is considerably a new area of study, but based on these early studies of gender on its platform, it can be argued that they were more or less reflective of the more recent trends in F2F communication and CMC research as reviewed above.

Giving evidence to the invalidity of difference-based approaches to gender online and the possible bias of corpora, Heragdelen and Baroni (2011) approached a corpus of Twitter data and an ukwac-corpus between 2005-2007 to find all to male/female references. They identified personal pronouns and a list of male and female names as well as verb phrases which characteristically occur with either gender. The two corpora have yielded completely different lists which indicates that different corpora give different results. Actions related to females on Twitter include reference to emotions or desires while males seem to be profit-oriented. On the ukwac, females are represented as child-bearing while males as taking positions of power. Neutral verb phrases include food-related actions in Twitter and work-related actions in ukwac.

Additionally, Kivran-Swaine et al. (2013) quantitatively investigated the gender effect on Twitter interactions with control for the strength of ties between participants. They maintained that the 'reply' option of Twitter gives a 'semi-public' effect and, in support of prior gender research, find distinctive linguistic styles of men and women. Similarly, Cunha et al. (2012) presented a description of gender-based distinctions in the choice of Twitter hashtags where gender was assigned to each user based on his/her name or username. The researchers concluded that gender as a social factor influences a user's choice of which hashtags to participate in, which may be predictable, and that male and female tweeps adopt distinct persuasion strategies (Cunha et al., 2012:324). By analysing a huge corpus of tweets produced in 2012, Sloan et al. (2013) illustrated how gender may be derived electronically through profile-name analysis and when gender identification

by username/handle failed, even with pseudonyms, a secondary method was mapped based on tweet text-analysis adopted from previous sociolinguistic work (Sloan et al., 2013).

A key work that adopted a rather nuanced approach to avoid the stable gender binary distinctions of previous work in concert with the linguistic accommodation theory and socio-constructionist approaches is Bamman, Eisenstein, and Schnoebelen (2014:150-1). They clustered Twitter users into groups who enacted their gender similarly based on linguistic variables, including pronouns, emotion terms, emoticons, a set of kinship terms, abbreviations, lengthening, etc., then assigned gender to them by comparing their first self-reported names to the historical census information from the U.S. Social Security Administration, a gender prediction of 88% accuracy was achieved. They concluded that there was no 100% male or female cluster because gender can only be accurately understood in terms of situated meaning.

Therefore, it may be concluded that quite a body of work exists on the representation of men and women in a range of genres, but what is important for the purposes of this study, which is concerned with how men and women represent and position themselves in debates about women's issues. These studies have shown evidence that virtual representations of the self often reflect real gender identities and patterns (e.g. Huffaker and Calvert, 2005; Rodino, 1997). The notion of homophily further problematised gender-based distinctions because they are not affected by the gender factor alone (Shapp, 2014), which were also based on Western constructions of what perceptions and emotions are associated with gender and this, in turn, influences ideologies and societal perceptions that set expectations and gender roles on men and women. This raises the question of whether such patterns were documented in the ME.

When the internet was introduced to the public in the ME, CMC platforms have increasingly attracted men and women especially in conservative contexts where gender mixing is prohibited and/or stigmatised. Most of the studies conducted on online Arabic communications were directed towards the effects of the medium on Arabic-speaking societies but no clear picture emerged out of scholarly investigations on the extent of mixed-gender communication in SA. Demirhan and Cakir-Demirhan (2015) challenged the proclaimed democratising effect of CMC channels when they found that Twitter was used to perpetuate a patriarchal discourse and stereotyping directed at women, e.g. irrationality, emotionality, jealousy, and attention seeking. However, they documented

traces of resistance of this hegemonic discourse, pointing to the development of online alternative publics.

Research on online communication in SA joined the debate about the effects of digital media on young people's language, cultural identity, and social relationship, describing it as an 'arena for their identity construction' (Shen and Khalifa, 2010). It is a new public space where the genders can interact freely (Al-Saggaf and Begg, 2004; Kutbi, 2015; Samin, 2010), and a venue where they can experiment with self-disclosure, despite the anonymity features (Madini and De Nooy, 2013). Paradoxically, gender disclosure resulted in a highly gender segregated forum, reflecting the effect of dominant gender construction and separation in the Saudi context. The appropriateness of male-female communications online continues to be debated among Islamic scholars (Madini and De Nooy, 2013).

Other analyses of online communications advocated the use of the internet for online activism and collective action (Agarwal, Lim, and Wigand, 2012; Yuce, Agarwal, and Wigand, 2015). They seem to be decontextualised as they have ignored its ability to provide a space where gender segregation was overcome, pertinent issues were discussed, and many social norms were called into question. This was addressed by Tamimi (2010) who explored how and why Saudi women, of various social strata, turned to blogging as an interactive media tool akin to online journalism due to the absence of their voice in mainstream media, chained by guardianship or segregation rules. It attested for the use of internet as a tool for protest and its subsequent social, political, religious and cultural functions. These views demonstrate the double edgedness of internet and SM use as both an instrument for progressive flattening of social hierarchies and stratification, and as a means for maintaining pre-existing social norms and divisions (Samin, 2010:179).

With a focus on social tensions between the status quo and change and motivated by the widely-circulated stereotypes and misrepresentations of Saudi women (Al-Hejin, 2012), interest in how social change is negotiated in a fast-developing, yet conservative, country as SA has been flourishing. Adopting a corpus-assisted CDA approach, Almaghlouth (2017) examined English-speaking women-related blogs that were intended to promote women's empowerment. She aimed to understand how discourse can play a role in changing power imbalances by focusing on bloggers' perception of change and the status quo. Eclectically drawing on van Dijk's notion of mental representations (2009), social actor representation, and the textual parameters of Koller (2012), she found



that, unlike Twitter where there is a wider varied public, these blogs are not the best pro-change discursive spaces because they were communicated in English and thus constituted a closed community of people who mainly shared the same interest. She provided evidence of the impact of the Saudi society and the dominant ideological constructions within it as fossilised forms resulting in a mismatch between the bloggers' empowering intention, which was expressed mainly in evaluative and metaphoric choices of words, and the underlying representation of women. The way women were talked about showed them not as active or powerful as a discourse meant to empower them should. Conversely, opponents were assigned power and an asymmetrical relationship persists. The choice to blog in English was perceived by the conservatives as an abandonment of the original Arabic and Islamic identity and an adoption of a Westernised one.

Worthy of mention also is Almujaivel's (2017) corpus-based work that focused on the discursive patterns of anti-feminist and pro-feminist discourses found in selected Arab women-related topics in the Arabic newspapers' subset of the *Arabic Corpus of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology*. This method was conducted through a CDA analysis of expanded concordances of two nodes: *almar?a* and *alnisa:?* (women). He found that there is a high level of negativity for the topics: discrimination, the veil, sports, marriage, pro-divorce settlement, municipal elections, etc. He qualitatively interpreted the discursive construction of the (un)veil issue and concluded that the discourses generated by social actors with extremist ideologies, whether Islamic elites or liberals, were negative due to the prevalence of masculine hegemony. These discourses helped maintain the status quo and ought to be investigated in further studies exploring other contexts and various issues.

The field of CMC is still young and continues to evolve. The next section focuses on the communicative functionality of Twitter's affordances and the literature concerned with these aspects receives more attention.

### **3.2.4 Studies on Twitter and its communicative functionality**

This section situates the research on the CMC terrain focusing on the communicative functionality of Twitter and reviewing its various discursive functions. Microblogs are a focused and miniature form of blogging, but the label is a misnomer because it disregards the network dynamics of Twitter's communication, which is different from blogging as a relatively new genre of writing. Its categorisation as an overlap between SM and SNS,

has been problematised (Murthy, 2013). Murthy (2013:8) differentiates the two labels in terms of emphasis: SM “is not as ‘bounded’ to communities of friends as social network sites are”. Twitter displays both similarities and differences to all three categories. Page (2012b:5) defines SM as an all-encompassing category as “web-based applications that promote social interactions between participants”, including discussion forums, blogs, wikis, podcasts, microblogging, Youtube, and SNSs. Twitter retains the ‘friends’ capability though message reach beyond that social-networking list (Jue, Marr, and Kassotakis, 2010). It gives access to ordinary people, yet the ‘influencers’ category may still be controlled by a few. The present research uses the terms ‘SM’ and ‘SNS’ interchangeably, but since our words become our world, it is worth noting that there is a need to bring the problem of terminology to the forefront to avoid any technological determinism or reductionism.

Compared to other extended SM platforms and F2F interactions which demand effort and a wide set of niceties, Twitter is popular because it is a concentrated form of digital communication which cuts across these demands with its inherent constraints, i.e. limited linguistic space and the unified template in which tweets are presented. It requires low ‘transactional costs’, i.e. the effort involved in sending or sharing messages, and provides ‘increased opportunities for monomodal communications using text’ to communicate ideas and feelings, make requests, and regularly maintain connections in less detailed formats (Jones and Hafner, 2012:74). Its affordances also include ease of use, interactivity, and open access. It has been dubbed ‘a linguistic marketplace’ because of its distinctive features that enable users to maximise a ‘linguistic capital’ by gaining ‘attention’ and increasing their ‘influence’ and ‘visibility’ for personal, economic, or social gains (Page, 2012a:182). The ‘locomotive’ nature of data derived from these spaces has attracted attention as a source of information on the identities, perceptions, reactions, opinions, and actions expressed by ‘the digital publics’ (Bruns, Burgess, Highfield, Kirchhoff, and Nicolai, 2011).

The writing of tweets resembles the characteristic text styles of simplified writing found in SM and Computer-mediated Discourse (CMD) in general. These features include the common use of vernacular varieties of language, short forms (e.g. 2 for ‘to’), initialisms (e.g. LOL, BRB, etc.), emoticons, and tiny URLs to save ‘expensive’ space on a tweet. However, short forms and acronyms do not apply to all languages, for example they have no equivalents in Arabic since a word like حتى (*Hatta*: i.e. until) does not have

a short form and a phrase such as مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي (*mawaqi9 altawa: Sul ?al?ijtima:9iy*, i.e. social networking websites) does not have an acronym.

In response to users' needs, two interactive symbols were later added to the list of Twitter-specific actions, i.e. follow, retweets, likes, etc. to allow for more meaningful interactions. These markers are mentions (@username) to reply or produce addressed tweets, and hashtags. These symbols are considered 'discursive markers' because they indicate strategic moves taken in discourse to frame the direction of and attitude in a message. For instance, a mention as a discursive practice can engage other users in a way akin to gaze and turn-taking in everyday talk with different levels of formality associated with it (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009), while a hashtag is used to aggregate several tweets on the same topic. Both innovations can contextualise and reveal ideological positioning by representing converging or diverging opinions/interests/concerns pertinent to a social group.

The platform was first developed as a broadcasting tool, not a platform for conversation. It invites its members to be in the here and now by responding to the question 'what are you doing?' in 140 characters or less<sup>3</sup>. For that reason, it was initially considered as a good example of 'phatic culture', where connections made up of small chunks of data are more important than content. Its presumed purpose is building relationships and maintaining a 'connected presence' (Miller, 2008: 396). Wittel (2001) described it as a 'flattening of communication' as well. Additionally, it was suggested that people seek to gratify their intrinsic need to connect with other people by using such conventions allowed on Twitter as status updates, addressed tweets, RTs, hashtags, following and gaining followers (Chen, 2011).

Despite these claims about its 'superficiality', phatic discourse can still convey information about society. Relationships between communicators and their sense of 'self' are both reflected in and influenced by discourse found within tweets because it is often loaded with the producer's ideology, outlook, and attitude. Zappavigna (2011) rejects the depiction of Twitter as 'phatic technology' in her study on 'ambient affiliation'. A single

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<sup>3</sup> This most-loved brevity feature of Twitter has changed on November 7, 2017, when Twitter announced that it has doubled the number of characters to 280 for all languages except Japanese, Chinese, and Korean.

discursive practice on Twitter may be culturally influenced within different communities of practice, e.g. Bamman et al. (2014) who attempted to predict the gender of Twitter users through linguistic markers defined by previous gender studies, Sloan et al (2013) who tried to do the same based on profile name and content analysis, Kivran-Swaine et al. (2013) who looked for distinctive linguistic styles on Twitter interactions using the 'reply' option, with control for the strength of ties between participants, Mahrt, Weller, and Peters (2013) who studied the use of micro-blogging among academics, and Cunha et al. (2012) and Page (2012a) who particularly focused on the use of Twitter hashtags.

A hashtag relates tweets within it to an ongoing conversation (Zappavigna, 2015) and public political debates attract more retweeting than entertainment-related tweets (Page, 2012a). Therefore, it would be reductionist to consider Twitter as 'phatic technology', i.e. communication tools that are 'non-dialogic' and 'non-informational', or even 'pointless' (Miller, 2008: 388). Fine-grained analyses of how conversations develop on Twitter and other CMC platforms were invited (Page, 2012a:199; Shapp, 2014) to ascertain that people use it to build social networks, identities, and affiliations while they present themselves to the online community. The following sections focusses on the functions of Twitter's communicative practices in relation to the objectives of the thesis.

#### 3.2.4.1 *Mentions*

The practice of mentioning is an (inter)discursive practice in tweets for conscious addressivity because it captures the attention of the addressee (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009). Mentions, represented by @s to invoke usernames, are used to tag or engage user(s) in conversation in like gaze and turn-taking patterns in everyday talk when exchanged in a back and forth manner on a semi-regular basis. There are identity implications of addressing users equally in a single public space and a user with power needs may seek affiliation through displaying connection to famous figures, whether they are prominent in real life or on SM. Since the data of this research is drawn from public conversations in hashtags, the effect of this practice is not very relevant. However, employing the other discursive markers: usernames, hashtags, and emoticons/emojis, were found to take on different relevant meanings to the present endeavour and which may be taken further in future studies. These functions are discussed in the following sections with special emphasis on hashtags as the primary data source of the present research.

#### 3.2.4.2 *Username*s

When one is introduced, the first thing people want to know to understand the situation and adjust their behaviour is one's name to start constructing his/her persona by attributing meanings to names and drawing conclusions about one's ethnic origin, gender, and personality. Names are basic determinants of first impressions, which are constantly managed by their bearers, which makes them part and parcel of their self-presentation strategies (Goffman, 1959). Based on onomastics, the study of names and name-giving, names and nicknames are part of any language and the social life of its speakers. They are integral to the construction and the representation of the self (Felecan and Bughesiu, 2013). While names are chosen by one's parents, nicknames are informal, changeable, and may be chosen and possibly disliked by that person. These statements hold of the nicknames and the self-selected pseudonyms that people adopt to communicate on online spaces.

The contemporary pre-eminence of electronic social-networking sites gave rise to the field of 'virtual onomastics'. Within these new virtual public spaces, new usernames and nicknames are set up that demonstrate the creativity, expressivity, and freedom of individual 'netizens' choices online (Astori, 2013:506). Because of users' desire for originality, they are afforded creative possibility in the choice of username/nicknames: variable size, variable stylistic effects, and variable multilinguistic/graphic codes (Felecan and Bughesiu, 2013: 524). That is why grouping nicknames thematically is problematic (Bughesiu, 2010), but there have been several attempts to map their variety. For example, Bechar-Israeli's (1996) attempt on the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) resulted in a categorisation scheme of 14 categories, i.e. age-related, famous people and groups, flora and fauna, meta-comment on anonymity of medium, onomatopoeia, place names, provocative, relationships to others, personal character traits, sex-related, technology-related, typography and special characters. This scheme was applied by Scheidt (2001) when she looked for gender differences in the semiotic significance of the avatars and nicknames adopted by adolescents online, with the addition of six more categories: actual name, diminutive, ethereal, popular sayings, belonging to a gang, and social status comments.

Nicknames play an important role in CMC as initial and 'critical means of presenting ourselves' (Bechar-Israeli, 1996). The original meaning of a 'nickname' has, hence, been semantically extended to include the 'attractive' identifiers adopted by online users to

either augment their self-image (real or constructed) or mirror their own attitudes, aspirations, or dreams. Usernames/nicknames can be telling devices about their bearers' identity better than formal names and may give off the ideological stance of the user. They may also be chosen to evoke a certain image or invite complex cultural associations or connotations (Lakaw, 2006). Examples from the current data are the nicknames 'ملحد سعودي' (a Saudi atheist) and 'معالي الربراي' (his honour the riberal [sic]) adopted by male users and 'متمردة' (a rebel) by a female user to announce rebellion in favour of freedom of choice.

The two categories of names and usernames/nicknames/pseudonyms may also be said to correspond to Jeshion's (2004) classification of ostensive, denotative names whose references are fixed, and connotative names, which are usually anonymous to counteract the limitations imposed by the official names, meant to hide and multiply one's identity online, due to the lack of physical cues (Astori, 2013:517-8). It has been claimed that the degree of the anonymity in nicknames depends on the topic in synchronous communication (changing nicknames was possible in chat platforms) or the purpose of asynchronous communication (Lakaw, 2006). Contrary to what was expected, many CMC users were found to 'advertise their true selves by using their actual name/nickname/diminutive and self-character traits (Scheidt, 2001:21; Wallace 1999:48). Besides avatars (user's display picture) and written - and more recently multi-modal - discourse, gender was partly constructed through the choice of nicknames developing a personal performance of femininity or masculinity (Scheidt, 2001). This finding is in line with socio-constructivist theories because the choice of a nickname and a degree of anonymity, depending on the amount of personal information users give (overt information) or give-off (convert information), facilitate a level of playfulness for users to experiment with shaping their identities, disguise their real identities, or attract attention (Astori, 2013: 518). As such, virtually-constructed identities relate to Bughesiu's (2010:59) 'programmed identity', which includes three types of actions: 'self-selection, self-promoting, and self-representation'.

No claims could be made about the first language of the contributors in the present thesis because of the absence of demographic or interview data, but since the language of the tweets is mainly Arabic, more specifically Saudi dialect, it can be assumed that their first language is Arabic. Hence, the process of choosing a username and a display name (real or a pseudonym) requires them to move from their own language's naming potential

plan to English, as the lingua franca of Twitter, employing mental and verbal morphological, derivational and, perhaps, equivalence processes (Zawodzinska-Bukowiec, 2013:491). They can use English alphanumerical characters after @ in the username field, but may manipulate other syllabic, graphic, or multi-lingual letter characters for their nicknames. Choosing or creating a username is, hence, a conscious performative speech act, an act of nomination by creation, which can be a wishful, realistic, metaphorical, metonymic, or artificial form of naming (ibid). Both the @username and display name may represent the user's official name, an anthroponym, or it can be a nickname or a pseudonym.

#### 3.2.4.3 *Hashtags*

The most relevant discursive practice on Twitter to the present study is hashtagging. Because of their embeddedness in people's everyday life, hashtags mediate and are mediated by social practice and should be studied in relation to each other and to other social activities within the wider social context (Lee, 2018:2). Hashtags are sequences of 'non-whitespace characters' following the hash symbol (#) (Tsur and Rappoport, 2012). A hashtag is listed on the 'trending topics' bar of Twitter's homepage when it is used with sufficient frequency. That means that any tweet containing that trending hashtag will be promoted to an extended audience far beyond the follower list of its author with the potential of connecting to audiences even outside Twitter through sharing or a web search. However, the presence of the 'hash' symbol in a tweet may not be necessary for Twitter aggregator tools to pick its keywords up when they are trending. As a meta-discourse marker, it is analysable in terms of placement and functionality.

A hashtag may describe a topic, an event, an issue, be a playful representation of a concept or a means to link topics together. Its inclusion in a tweet presupposes the user's knowledge of previous related posts with the same keywords and a realisation of the presence of an 'imagined' audience that may choose to 'tune in', ignore, contest, or align with the content of the tweet and thus affording new forms of social (Anderson, 2006; Zappavigna, 2015). As evidenced in the use of Twitter's interactive affordances, Pavalanathan and Eisenstein (2015) argue that its users are aware of an audience, which explains why there are personalised 'local' hashtags aimed to communicate to a certain audience, e.g. the Saudis. The audience of a hashtag exhibit characteristics of 'participatory culture' in that Twitter members are no longer passive consumers and can

assume the role of a ‘producer’ by creating new hashtags to promote their own topics and search keywords (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns and Jacobs, 2006).

The original function of tagging to embed ‘meta-data’ (data about data) to group tweets with similar topics together, but this function of topic marking and indexing was transcended. It was later described as ‘social tagging’ because it allows collaborative text annotations in relation to the ‘search’ function of Twitter and other SM posts (Kehoe and Gee, 2011). According to Lee (2018), social tagging is broadly defined as “the practice of creating and adding user-generated keywords to annotate uploaded content for a number of purposes in Social media”. Social tagging is considered a form of linguistic innovation (Cunha, et al., 2011) and a semiotic strategy in online discourse (Zappavigna, 2015: 289). Scholarly works investigating the different communicative functions of hashtags as appropriated by users have been on the rise (Shapp, 2014; Wikstrom, 2014b; Zappavigna, 2015).

As a form of interactional communication made available to users who wish to extend a tweet’s functionality beyond the maximum 140-characters and the set of their followers, a hashtag can connect them to the larger social network, forming communities (Yang, Zhang, and Mei, 2012; Zappavigna, 2011, 2015) or publics (Bruns and Burgess, 2011). ‘Hashtag publics’ is a key concept creating a sort of social structure, i.e. groups of users who form an ‘ad-hoc circle’ to debate or express their views about a particular topic expressed in a hashtag which (Bruns and Burgess, 2011). Since hashtags appear as clickable and ‘render discourse findable’, they allow discourses and conversations to be found, creating a connection that Zappavigna (2011, 2015) calls ‘ambient communication’, rendering hashtags as ‘searchable talk’ (ibid).

The ‘conversational’ function of hashtags was recognised by Huang et al. (2010) when users employ them to engage in dialogical exchanges with themselves or others to demonstrate a stance and ‘communicate more visibly’, e.g. #Laugh, or with others to ‘encourage interaction’, e.g. #JudgeMe (Evans, 2016; Huang, et al., 2010: 175). A hashtag may function like a ‘conversational aside’ as it constructs a relationship with an ambient audience by facilitating commentary and meta-evaluations of the contents of the tweet (Georgakopoulou, 2013, Zappavigna, 2015). When hashtags enact meta-evaluations, many of them are quite idiosyncratic, meant to exaggerate or to humour something (Zappavigna, 2015).



Among the functions that hashtags were shown to serve is news and information sharing (Bruns and Burgess, 2015; Small, 2011), community building (Bruns and Burgess, 2011), organising and planning socio-political events (Mohammed, Zhu, Kiritchenko and Martin, 2015; Small, 2011), for social activism (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015), as a form of literary practice that enable involvement in social issues and can be multi-lingual (Baron and Lee, 2013), and as currency in the linguistic marketplace on Twitter (Page, 2012a). Social/political tags can be used to position users in conversation even when they are not directly talking with each other (Page, 2012a; Zappavigna, 2012, 2015). Other academic investigations focused on trending topical hashtags and found that they have different propagation patterns based on their topical categories: some are more 'sticky' and 'persistent' than others (Romero, Meeder, and Kleinberg, 2011). Zappavigna (2015) distinguished between 'enduring tags', which represent ongoing social practices (e.g. #Follow), and 'short-lived tags' that are created as a reaction to an event. In hashtags, sarcasm and irony were also studied (Kunneman, Liebrecht, van Mulken, and van den Bosch, 2015).

Drawing on Halliday's (1978) and Halliday and Mattheissen (2004), Zappavigna (2015) studied how hashtags operate as social meta-data to enact the ultimate social function of ambient community. The searchability of hashtags' keywords allows for 'different dimensions of their discourse to be retrieved and aggregated', supporting ambient intertextuality (Zappavigna, 2015:289). Hashtags were found to enact non-exclusive communicative functions: experiential topic markers, interpersonal relationships, and text organisation and punctuation (ibid). From an experiential perspective, hashtags may be said to set up an attributive relationship between the tweet as a 'token' and the hashtag as its label or 'type'. They can adopt any of the experiential roles as found in clauses, i.e. processes (verbal phrases), participants (noun phrases), or circumstances (prepositional or adverbial phrases), occupying different locations in the clause and the tweet as well. The semantic domain of the topics they cover ranges from 'tight' to 'too general' with the 'middle range' being pertinent hashtags that relate to a wide public.

From a textual perspective, it can be placed anywhere within a tweet with the typographical hash symbol separating the hashtag from the primary content. At the end of the tweet, it becomes a form of punctuation (Georgakopoulou, 2013). Hashtags operate on an interpersonal level within discourse as they allow users who contribute to a trending

topic to affiliate with other Twitter users who are not among their followers. Hashtags provide access to the reader's perspective of the 'aboutness' of texts in various ways, e.g. domain, evaluative words, topic hierarchy, meta-data, signposts, synonyms, antonyms, or hyponyms, etc. (Kehoe and Gee, 2011). They may serve to aggregate or emphasise a certain stance on an issue or an event and can function as 'carriers of attitude and emotion' (Barton and Lee, 2013; Lee, 2018) and 'identity markers' (Giaxoglou, 2018). For example, it may function as a discursive social space or a polyphonic backchannel for 'live-tweeting', where multiple voices, comments, and stances are gathered about a live event, a conference, or a TV feature (Georgakopoulou, 2013; McCarthy and Boyd, 2005; Puschmann, 2015; Reinhardt, Ebner, Beham, and Costa, 2009).

Following from the demonstrated divergence of hashtag functions, there were attempts to name the different types of hashtag. Highfield, Harrington, and Bruns (2013: 321) speak of a 'topical' in contrast to 'emotive' hashtags corresponding to Page (2012a) 'topical' and 'evaluative' hashtags, and Shapp's (2014) default type topic-marking 'Tags', and 'Commentary' hashtags, which will be adopted here for pragmatic purposes. Tags name the topic, a concrete entity, person, place, company, or event, to provide context for indexing the tweet or to connect with different levels of the public, from local to global. Tags set up the context or topic that is evaluated by the body of the tweet while Commentary hashtags evaluate the rest of the tweet or add an extra meaning to it. Commentary hashtags can be long and, hence, often idiosyncratic, and are not intended to connect to a wider audience, but have the potential of becoming Tags when they circulate well enough. They are sometimes used to circulate memes, mostly light-hearted or thought-provoking ideas in the form of participatory hashtags that people learn about and contribute to, blurring the line between the two types of hashtags (Shapp, 2014:6).

Shapp (2014) argues that 'Tags' tend to be positioned at beginning, middle or outside of the tweet whereas Commentary are likely positioned at the end or integrated as part of the main content. If the hashtag is placed at the start of a tweet, it resembles the function of a 'mention', but it points to a topic rather than an individual. It indicates the importance and focus the individual has ascribed to it by its inclusion while projecting a certain affiliation with people concerned with that 'topic', a type of identity work. After applying Bamman et al.'s (2014) gender assignment technique, reviewed in Section 3.2.3, Shapp (2014) found a strong gender influence on the frequency of the two hashtag types among male and female tweeps. Male users preferred Tags while female users preferred

Commentaries. Traced back to Herring and Paolillo's (2006) study, these gender preferences seem to mirror studies on gendered styles and the distinctions made in the classification of weblog genres to knowledge management and personal diary blogs on the informational vs. involvement scale.

To conclude, the functions of hashtags were studied mainly on Twitter and scarcely on other SM platforms (Lee, 2018). Linguistic research into social tagging is limited and those that exist focused on monolingual English hashtags (Lee, 2018:21). The present thesis covers sampled Arabic hashtags with Arabic contributions to explore the richness of stance, opinion, and evaluation.

#### 3.2.4.4 *Emoji*

As reviewed in Section 3.2.3, some CMC platforms are characterised by using written text as the main means of expression, due to the absence of body language as well as of contextual factors, which allows for greater possibility of anonymity. Nevertheless, anonymity and the lack of non-linguistic aspects of online communication attracted users who felt the need to be creative to compensate for the absence of non-verbal and paraverbal aspects of communication in textual SM platforms in ways that brought CMC closer to real life interactions. Among these creative means for self-representation are avatars, emoticons, and emoji, which have become a part of their users' lexicon (Felecan and Bughesiu, 2013:522; Lakaw, 2006).

Emoticon symbols were first developed as non-standard linguistic compensatory tools to convey non-linguistic information such as emotion or mood, i.e. affective and interpersonal stance (Jones and Hafner, 2012:70; Walther and D'Addario, 2001). The term 'emoticons' is a blend of 'emotion' and 'icons'. Prototypical emoticons were text-based glyphs introduced to users in 1982 by manipulating sequences of ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) characters (Crystal, 2001: 36). Early studies on the role of emoticons in textual communication since the 1980s were quantitative. They focused on the emotive function of emoticons reflecting the affective orientation that plagued much of the descriptions and analysis of other CMC communicative patterns (Baron 2004; Crystal, 2001; Derks, Bos, and von Grumbkow, 2008; Provine, Spencer and Mandell, 2007; Walther and D'Addario, 2001; Wolf, 2000).

Emoticons are viewed in CMC research and in popular culture as emotion markers presuming an affective function (Dresner and Herring, 2010:251). They may be used to

express emotions, to assert a positive feeling or gratitude, display solidarity, or offer an apology, but a one-to-one correspondence between emoticons and affective states was not possible, which undermines their very naming (Jones and Hafner, 2012; Wolf, 2000:830). They also served social functions: ‘affiliative’ functions, such as promoting rapport (e.g. Holmes and Schnurr, 2005), and ‘tone management’, e.g. by marking sarcasm and humour (e.g. Derks et al., 2008) or irony (e.g. Walther and D’Addario, 2001), signalling a mismatch between what is said and what is meant. These findings led to an understanding of the crucial role context plays in identifying the functions of emoticon use (e.g. Dresner and Herring, 2010).

In their attempt to situate emoticons on a continuum between language and non-language, Dresner and Herring (2010) applied speech act theory and identified three broad, potentially overlapping, linguistic functions: as ‘iconic’, i.e. non-verbal indicators of ‘emotional meaning’ mapped directly onto facial expressions; as markers of ‘non-emotional meaning’ mapped conventionally onto bodily expressions; and as indicators of the ‘pragmatic meaning’ of a message (the illocutionary force indicating device: IFID), i.e. communicating the user’s intent or modulating an already identifiable illocutionary act, e.g. for mitigation (Dresner and Herring, 2010:256).

Since emoticons may convey pragmatic meaning, this function needs to be understood in linguistic, rather than extra- or non-linguistic terms. Dresner and Herring (2010) suggested that the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects in CMC interactions may have meaning independently from each other and that contextual interpretation draws on the interaction between the two (ibid:252). As a result, the textual means for expressing illocutionary force in pragmatics have been expanded in contemporary CMC to include emoticons as its typographic indications. Yet, there is no fixed correspondence between any one common emoticon and a certain illocutionary force as their use comprises both conventional and non-conventional aspects, the conventions being drawn from F2F communication or those evolved within CMC (ibid:255).

Similar studies have shown that emoticons can be used as structural markers or punctuation (Markman and Oshima, 2007; Provine, Spencer, and Mandell, 2007, Walther and D’Addario, 2001). Provine, Spencer and Mandell (2007) found that emoticons rarely interrupt the flow of textual discourse in the same way as laughter rarely does in spoken discourse because the emotive expression is less important than the higher-level process of language production. Recent studies demonstrate that emoticons discursively show

how a message should be read, as sarcastic, metaphorical, or just humorous, which not only adds an interactive, conversational character to tweets by personalising them in a way that is engaging to the recipients, but also saves character space while being intrinsically linked to discourse (Pavalanathan and Eisenstein, 2016).

Pragmatic investigations into the functional variance of emoticons document the multi-functionality and contextual nature of their use, a product of their novelty, which in turn makes them difficult to analyse at the outset (Dresner and Herring, 2010; Schnoebelen, 2012; Vandergriff, 2014). They can also serve as ‘contextualisation cues’ by clearly communicating the sender's intention or stance with respect to the discourse and/or their recipients (Vandergriff, 2014) and are open to interpretation (Miller, Thebault-Spieker, Chang, Johnson, Terveen, and Hecht, 2016). Yet this context sensitivity remains an understudied area within CMC and requires qualitative approaches at the discourse level. Emoticons expanded in form to represent more realistic faces, objects, and activities and their popularity declined in favour of more visually expressive graphical icons (Chen and Sui, 2013).

More recently, emoticons have been instantiated in the form of small, two-dimensional pictographs known as emoji. ‘Emoji’ is a Japanese word meaning “picture word”, a pictograph, most of which are graphical renderings of well-known emoticons. Common on mobile phones and adopted by SNSs like Twitter, they also contain other word-replacing pictographs that represent objects, celebrations, activities, weather, vehicles and buildings, food and drinks, animals and plants, etc. Due to their variety, compactness, ease of use, familiarity, efficiency, and accuracy, they allow for creativity and multi-functionality, enabling users to extend the meaning of their words and flexibly construct social meanings (Vandergriff, 2014).

The Unicode Consortium, a non-profit organisation made up mostly of software and technology companies, often updates the list of emoji. In 2015, new icons representing different ethnic and marginalised groups were added to Unicode 8.0. Such changes brought the political notions of equality and inclusivity or representativeness to the fore, especially that a lot can also be said by omission. When using emoji, users are faced with the dilemma of choosing to represent their ethnicity and sexual orientation or risk deny parts of their identity. It follows that the racial and gendered subtexts underlying them can be investigated to understand who opts for the non-default yellow faces and why. The view of the internet as a raceless utopian world was further deflated because race can now

be reproduced online (McGrill, 2016). Besides a desire to sound more lively, interesting, and richly expressive to draw attention (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005), or be more ‘socially present’ (Chen and Sui, 2007; Yamada and Akihori, 2007), people’s choice of emoticons/emojis is influenced by technological considerations relevant to the medium, efficiency consideration of the communication (type of the interaction, its timing, synchronicity), and contextual and situational factors (setting, level of formality, communication purpose) (Derks, Bos, and Von Grumbkow, 2007; Dresner and Herring, 2010; Herring, 2007; Huang et al., 2008).

Among these situational factors, user demographics like gender and age (Chen and Sui, 2007) and topic of discussion can also affect emoticon use. Gender was deemed important by some studies as emoticons, coupled with their association with affect, were found more frequent in female online textual discourse, whether synchronous (Baron, 2004; Herring, 2003) or asynchronous (Witmer and Katzman, 1997; Wolf, 2000). Results were contradicting since, in Wolf’s (2000) study, men used emoticons to express sarcasm while in Huffaker and Calvert (2005), teenage male bloggers used more flirtatious and sad emoticons than females. Moreover, people who are shy and reluctant to express their feelings in F2F communication, especially with the other sex, find it easier to express themselves using emoji (Chen and Sui, 2007:640). More recently, Herring and Daina (2017) analysed the conversational and pragmatic uses of various types of ‘graphicons’ in sampled public threads from graphicon-focused Facebook groups. These graphicons include emoticons, emojis, stickers, GIFs, images, and videos. They found that graphicons to have six main functions: mention, reaction, tone modification, riffing, action, and narrative sequence, and that and emojis expressed the widest range of functions. This suggests the richness of meaning emojis have come to have despite the availability of other graphical options.

Emojis have evolved into ‘an idiomatic mode of expression’, since the meanings ascribed to them can change with the situational and cultural context, as semantic symbols that expedite the sending, interpreting, and responding of a message and minimise communicative distance for more interpersonal connectedness. Because of emojis’ affordance of saving character space and the wide spread use of Apple devices or mobile telephony among the Saudi youth, non-textual varieties of emoticons and emoji in the present endeavour will be explored in context only as far as they are considered as useful discursive devices.

Overall, based on what was explained in this section and in Chapter 2 about the specific social and technological contexts of this research and the statistics provided there, it is evident that Twitter has high penetration amongst Saudi women and is a relatively new interactional tool that allows them to debate issues with men. In keeping with Honeycutt and Herring (2009) and Gillen and Merchant (2013), the present research assumes that in Twitter-based discussions, tweeps, male and female, engage in conversations about matters pertinent to Saudi women and these debates are condensed yet facilitated by the features of the platform. Studying selected example hashtags can give insight into traditional and competing patterns, or attitudes towards gender roles among Twitter users, which could go unnoticed or ‘unspoken’ if not critically analysed.

The explosion of CMC and Twitter research has led to an encounter between technology and methodology affecting the status and practice of research as well as the produced knowledge (Borra and Rieder, 2014: 264). Consequently, methodological, epistemological, ethical, legal, and political questions of ‘big data’ were raised (Puschmann and Burgess, 2013). As described earlier, sociability on Twitter is structured and formalised but its interface inherently defines basic affordances to fulfil the social interactions (tweets, usernames, profiles, lists), actions (follow, hashtags, mentions, retweets, likes, polls), and characteristics (140 characters, profile bio, display picture). As such, it frames which entities appear as a case and consequently be part of a sample for a study (Borra and Rieder, 2014:267). Additionally, data-capturing applications may also add to this framing of the empirical because they influence decisions made during data-collection and the selection of variables. These issues will be taken into consideration during data collection and analysis.

### **3.2.5 Studies on Twitter in SA**

This section reviews some of the literature on Twitter with emphasis on its social significance and hashtagging. Currently, there is a rise in interest in topics related to Saudi women’s issues in Twitter hashtags. The transformative potential of SM technologies in the ME was identified by Eickelman (2003) and Castells (2015) among others. Twitter and hashtags have proven powerful in their mobilisation of citizens during the Arab Spring uprisings in the ME. Its popularity among the Saudi youth has been documented on various levels, e.g. the literacy practices online by Albawardi (2017). The use of

Arabic among female students was prominent, yet Albawardi's (2017) data demonstrated the existence of diglossia in SA where shifts to MSA were found to be 'strategic'.

Therefore, Samin's (2010:188-9) hashtag analysis confirmed that they have allowed public conversations to play out, characterised by dialogism and diglossia. They confront users with received ways of thinking, some of which were legitimised by religious doctrines, e.g. the guardianship rule, and the patriarchal structures that lead to the instrumentality of women, e.g. early marriage and the restriction of out-marriage of lineage. These ideas have come to be under public scrutiny. Hence, the legitimacy power of the strategy of religious discourse to maintain or defend the status quo of gender politics and gender segregation was recognised (Hachimi, 2001). Another study that explored hashtags is Chaudhry (2014) who addressed progress in the situation of Saudi women as an example to illustrate why ME countries including SA decided to strictly regulate their citizens' Twitter usage. The #Women2Drive campaign (2011-2017) engendered both local and global interest in the issue. Chaudhry (2014:944) suggested that Twitter creates a mass self-communication platform and predicted that it could promote quiet social progress in SA because it was linked with governmental adjustments made to create a more inclusive space for women in the society despite hateful public reactions.

More recently, well-contextualised academic works that focused on discourse in hashtags include Almahmoud (2015), Alotaibi (2017), and Alharbi (2016) among others. Almahmoud (2015) studied Twitter as the domain where framing and intertextuality intersect on CMC. Two datasets drawn from Saudi women activists and men clerics engaging in a debate on Saudi women's right to drive were approached contrastively to understand how social hierarchies of power and gender operate in an online environment. She identified intertextuality as the prominent discursive strategy used by both groups to frame the driving subject differently to justify their positions and align with their own community of supporters while still abiding to government's regulations. One of these intertextual means was the use of hashtags about Saudi women driving. Whereas men tended to use Arabic in their posts, women occasionally wrote their posts and hashtags in English, e.g. *Women2drive*, to signal group membership and frame the campaign as a global human-rights issue. Conversely, the campaign was framed by men clerics as a foreign conspiracy against the Saudi moral code and political system.



Comparable to Almahmoud (2015) is Alotaibi (2017) who applied Cohen's theory of moral panics to a content analysis of the discourse of supporters and opponents of women driving in 340 tweets from the hashtag #Women2Drive in 2011. The tweets were categorised for the emerging themes of Westernisation, mockery, defiance of State, and defiance of gender discrimination. With a focus on opponents, she found that their arguments were developing a 'gendered' moral panics narrative that threatened normative gender relations. The social action of driving was recontextualised as a threat to the morality and traditions of society. Sahly (2016) utilised Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count to measure emotional and cognitive processes in a database of 1300 tweets. It was employed for the examination of the ways in which tweeps frame and construct the women driving issue, due to its pervasiveness on the online platform. He found that the issue was frequently discussed in a cognitive frame, using the language of logic, causation, problem-solving, assessment, and thinking.

These studies, despite the novel and valuable contribution they make to the understanding of Twitter-based debates, were interested in gender, but lack any theorisation of the concept of gender that goes beyond echoing gender difference and polarisation. In comparison, Alharbi (2016) investigated the same online 'right to drive' hashtagged debate using a contrastive critical analysis framework but to focus mainly on the portrayal of Saudi women. He adopted Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to analyse a corpus of written posts by Saudi women about the right to drive at three levels: textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and sociocultural practice. It was concluded that the theme of ingroup/outgroup polarisation persisted in the data and that ideologies were linguistically mediated through labelling, presuppositions, predication, and intertextuality. This controversy, when situated within its broader sociocultural context, appeared to be part of the wider complexity of sociocultural practice in SA.

Overcoming such focus on the discourse of women activists, Altoaimy (2017) was an attempt to theorise the ways in which tweeps debate the driving ban on Saudi women in the ongoing discussions about the issue on Twitter, with the objective of exposing the various perspective adopted by contributors to those discussions while explicating the gender roles and relations that are deliberated. On a corpus of Arabic tweets that discuss the ban from 2015, she combines a corpus-assisted discourse approach (Baker, 2006) with a DHA approach (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Her finding revealed that supporters of the ban highlight the social and moral threats of lifting the ban and allocate the role of

marking the commitment to the country's religious image to women. Most tweets, however, were expressing frustration and a desire for change by publicising the victimisation of women because of being caught up between modernity and tradition and pointing to contradictions and inconsistencies in the patriarchal social order. Situating this struggle against a patriarchal discourse, a discourse of women's rights was present. She argued that Twitter offers Saudi women a discursive space where there is no alternative public space for them to communicate and disseminate their needs and concerns.

Therefore, high quality literature on the gendered discourses in online and offline Arabic communities is only beginning to emerge. In accordance with the theory that discourse is both socially constitutive and constituted (Fairclough, 1995; Kramsch 1998), this study raises the question of whether online discourse on Twitter plays a major role in constructing gender identities, subject positions, relationships, and practices contextualised in the socio-political scene and power dynamics that drive the gender division. Hence, examining prevailing linguistic choices by and about women may offer valuable insights into the present status of Saudi gender affairs as reflected in discourse and the discourses they draw upon creatively to call for gradual social change.

### **3.3 Summary of key issues and research questions**

The reviewed literature shows that many studies within the various approaches to language and gender have unintentionally perpetuated a gender-difference approach. Similarly, there are scarce critical research studies on language and gender in Arabic. Those that are found rely on the same features forwarded by Western scholars, an approach which has recently been put under scrutiny. However, these studies have yielded no consistent results and were thus accused of being overshadowed by stereotypes leading to value-laden conclusions and claims of superiority/inferiority and powerfulness/powerlessness. Such criticism stands as, based on de Certeau ([1980]1984), all types of communication in all types of situations are valuable in linguistics and diversity should not be overlooked by stereotypes and generalisations.

The same patterns are found in the reviewed literature on gender in CMC platforms, which are characterised by 'optional' anonymity and flexibility (Crystal, 2001). It has been argued that these features lead to dis-inhibition and de-individuation (Al-Saggaf and Begg, 2004; Jaffe, Lee, Huang, and Oshagan, 1995) and, as a result, the question of

whether CMC platforms play a democratising effect in the virtual sphere has been raised (Graddol and Swann, 1989). It was later contradicted by empirical research conducted in the West demonstrating that offline social hierarchies are transferred to online interactions (e.g. Herring, 1993; Huffaker and Calvert, 2005).

Based on the features of anonymity and flexibility, 'self-reported' information provided by online users' may be argued as unreliable. However, it is the interaction between identity construction and the technological features inherent in CMC, as a discursive space, makes it fertile ground for a CDA study of the present kind. Balancing users' tendency to give/give off personal information online with socio-constructionist views that there is no 100% female or male person (Bamman et al., 2014) allows for more reliance on gender assignment based on how participants represent themselves at the time of contributing messages online. Such arguments gain certain urgency in a context that stigmatises cross-gender communication like SA.

Likewise, offline gender asymmetries in predominantly masculine Arab societies are said to have transferred to virtual environments as well (Al-Saggaf and Begg, 2004; Madini and de Nooy, 2013). Almujaivel's (2017) study may have pointed to the presence of gendered discourses where women-related issues are discussed with a negative light, but as it pointed out, the voices of women were barely present in the newspapers subset of the corpus and called for each topic and stance to be explored across contexts, genres, and domains to fill the gap in the literature regarding the socially constructed practices that create problems that hinder women in the Arab world.

These limited contemporary explorations of gender online in the Saudi context, however, were not based in linguistics and discourse. Twitter proves to be a new public space for Saudi men and women to communicate together in an otherwise strictly gender-segregated society (Chaudhry, 2014). Furthermore, it was claimed that the use of hashtags empowers women to discuss crucial matters in their lives and instigate social change (AlRasheed, 2013). The question arose whether the tweeps disclose their genders as they engage in national debates online. Studies confirm that users give off personal and demographic information in their usernames, display pictures, or messages (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005; Thomson, 2006).

Recent theoretical and empirical work in the field provide that gender cannot be separated from other aspects of identity. The relationship between language and gender can only be accurately characterised in terms of situated meanings, which construct

gender through a variety of stances, styles, and personae, performed differently in different situations (Ochs, 1992). Nonetheless, it needs to be borne in mind that other factors related to the virtual environments like genre (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005), topic (Thomson, 2006), group dynamics (Grob et al., 1997), and the broadcasting nature of some online discourses such as that of Twitter to support visibility (Page, 2012a) may have a modulating function.

Moving away from the biological essentialism found in mapping gender to the category of 'sex', 'gender' has come to be understood as the socially- and culturally-learned difference between men's and women's linguistic style, and later as a process of social construction and an idea or a set of ideas/beliefs expressed in and as discourse (Sunderland, 2004:14, 18). The substance of 'the gendered what' in a text has gained importance in indexing the fluid feminine and masculine gender identities emerging from the discursive practices people engage with in discourse (Sunderland, 2004:21).

This thesis aims to address the multiplicity of voices in the gendered discourses dominating hashtag debates about contentious issues concerning Saudi women in the Saudi Twitter-sphere. It aims to qualitatively expand on the assumption that male and female contributors to hashtag debates use them to reproduce or transform prevalent discourses that dictate their social roles in gendered ways by probing such subversive, discursive strategies accomplished through linguistic manifestations as humour, parody, taboo language, and intertextuality, which are used in topical Saudi women-related hashtags, and how they are used. For those purposes, this thesis adopts Sunderland's (2004) naming and identification approach to gendered discourses and is guided by the SAA framework of van Leeuwen (2008) and the DHA of Wodak and Reisigl (2001, 2009) in the identification of the various ways to look at discursive strategies at work. At the same time, it assumes Jones's (2010) understanding of creativity as residing in the discourses found in the samples as social actions intended by hashtag contributors as they try to find their way around constraints placed on them by the Discourses within which they are situated. In so doing, they act as agents of social change, which may be directed to positive change when people work together with researchers to invent alternative/competing discourses and Discourses and thus generate new realities, new ways of acting and communicating (Jones, 2010:477).

It relies on methods shown to be acceptable by previous studies to deduce the 'proclaimed' gender of the contributors of the sampled hashtags based on their

representation of themselves. Its focus is on how gender is performed and, hence, the need to verify the biological sex of the users, or who is doing gender, is countered by an eagerness to examine the enactment of gender. Male and female gender identities are discursive in that they are mainly constructed, and perpetuated, by socially-shared spoken and written discourses and, therefore, may be contested discursively (or non-discursively) once they are posted to the public sphere. By critically examining the cultural and social construction of gender in the hashtag contributions of the Saudis, in terms of their stances, subject positions, and social actions, a network of gendered discourses they draw on in these debates may be concluded. It follows that local expectations regarding gender can be inferred and the socialisation process of these expectations both through language and to use language can be concluded (Ochs, 1992). Additionally, a relation between the collective positioning and representation of Saudi men and women and their actual discourse in hashtagged debates may be suggested.

As argued earlier, some commentators argue that Saudi women are marginalised in the public sphere and are often silenced by a male-dominant social order even though they are recognised as important agents in the structure of society (e.g. AlRasheed, 2013; Chaudhry, 2014). Patriarchal discourses in these gendered spaces influence men and women as they enact the roles expected of them at home, in the street, at school, and at work. Still, gender-related issues receive little attention in Arabic linguistic studies and women are reluctant to confront resulting problems in domestic and professional settings. It is also argued that SM platforms, particularly Twitter, have created a new space for contesting these unjust social norms (ibid). The presence and power of these discourses, that are reflected online, and competing discourses that contest them, and the effect of their wide circulation on both directions, is the focus of this thesis.

The present research is intended as a response to researchers' calls in the field of gender and discourse to focus on discursive gaps, absences, or contradictions (Hollway, 1995; Sunderland, 2004) and the creative use of conventional discourses in unconventional ways to express dissent (Jones, 2010) (c.f. Section 3.2.3). In the same vein, it is also a response to Arab and Saudi discourse analysts' calls, e.g. Almujaivel (2017), Almaghlouth (2017), and Altoaimy (2017), to fill the huge knowledge gap regarding gendered discourses and prevailing constructions of social practices directly affecting women's lives in various parts of the ME. Motivated by this shortage of discursive studies about the situation of Saudi women, this thesis examines samples of

two example debates considering women's voice, hand in hand with the voice of their male fellow citizens during a transitional time of changing gender-power affairs as demonstrated in Chapter 2. Sampled data derived from Twitter-based hashtag debates allows for a deep exploration of what gendered discourses are at play, how and for what purpose people invoke them, and helps reveal strategic micro-mechanisms at work. Descriptive and general interpretive discourses will not be part of the present endeavour as its focus is only on interpretive gendered discourses and discourses made interdiscursively relevant by users to the rather specific debates at hand (Sunderland, 2004).

Additionally, to the knowledge of the researcher, very few studies has been found that combines CDA tools with language and gender to tackle Twitter datasets, especially in the problematic context of Saudi gender affairs. Those that exist explore hashtagged campaigns focusing on the driving ban on Saudi women decontextualised (e.g. Chaudhry, 2014; Samin, 2010) or embedded in the socio-political context with a corpus-assisted approach to multi-voicedness as represented in the discursive strategies utilised by the contributors to the campaign's hashtag (e.g. Altoaimy, 2017). The reviewed studies, however, attest to the transformative potential of SM, particularly Twitter. Other similarly corpus-assisted approaches focused on ideological conflicts over Saudi women's issues on blogs of advocates of women's rights in SA (e.g. Almaghlouth, 2017) or newspapers about women (ibid). Owing to such shortage of empirical research, especially that which addresses the role of polyphony in the discourse found in online Saudi women-related debates, it has become necessary to attempt a study investigating questions as the following:

**RQ1:**What broad discourses and underlying social constructions are drawn upon by contributors to the selected women-related hashtag debates about Saudi women? What interdiscursive links exist between them, and how are they used to reveal ideological positioning?

**RQ2:** What discursive strategies are used by the hashtag samples' contributors for the perpetuation, subversion, or disruption of prevalent discourses and gendered subject positions? And how are they linguistically realised?

**RQ3:** To what extent does Twitter as an (inter)discursive space have a transformative potential in facilitating social change in favour of women in SA?

The current research attempts to answer these questions adopting eclectic methods drawing on socio-constructionist theories to gender, CDA tools, and post-structuralist conceptualisations of discourse by examining the use of Twitter's basic affordances for the online discussions, how users position themselves with the gendered discourses invoked in these debates, whether traditional or otherwise, and the discursive strategies employed in doing so. Each question will be addressed by offering a summary of the findings of the three results chapters and relating them to arrive at an answer to the question. Answers to these questions are primarily interpretive and their answers may overlap.

In keeping with the initial findings and early views of CMC's democratizing potential (Graddol and Swann, 1989), it may be predicted that Twitter has maximised the participation of Saudi women in the public sphere, the access of which has largely been restricted to men (AlRasheed, 2013). With such features as hashtags, mentions, emoji, usernames, and retweets/likes, the lines between the 'private' and the 'public', the 'banal' and the 'informative', the 'broadcast' and the 'conversational' as well as between 'synchronous' and 'asynchronous' communication have been blurred on Twitter (Page, 2012a; Puschmann, 2015).

In hashtag debates, women now have access to a new semi-public floor where they can overcome physical restraints imposed on them and rally support from like-minded users locally and globally. The present thesis aims to qualitatively analyse the first 1000 tweets of two Saudi women-related hashtags, from their trending date in June, 2015, with a focus on the influx of gendered discourses and discursive strategies employed to reproduce/transform current social practices during a time of social change.

Drawing on notions of language as both socially determined and determinative (Fairclough, 1995; Kramsch, 1998) and polyphony (Bakhtin, 1992), the present study attempts to denaturalise dominant discourses taken as common-sense and highlight the rise of dissenting voices within the hashtag debates about women. The present thesis can help reveal patterns of representation that point to a discursive reconfiguration of gender power relations that are often depicted in gender studies in prevailingly patriarchal social contexts, commonly presuming men's language at one end as the powerful variety and women's language at the other end as the powerless variety (e.g. Lakoff, 1975). Bearing in mind that the genre is relatively new, and the topic is related to women which may influence results (Herring and Paolillo, 2006; Thomson, 2006), the study attempts to

avoid binary oppositions previously assumed in power-based approaches to gender while challenging the stereotype that prevails outside SA of Saudi women as either submissive or suppressed.

The broad relevance of this research area could not be emphasised enough. It aims to contribute to the ongoing national dialogue about Saudi women's rights encouraging informed understanding of the power of discourse. Saudi men's and women's awareness of how dominant discourses subject position them to sustain the current power relations enables them to take the responsibility of initiating alternative or resistant discourses or narratives that will make the social change they seek possible within the religious and cultural parameters of their context. Its results could have important implications for both educational and workplace arenas and be vital for increasing individuals' awareness of various forms of language styles as well as the value of the contributions different types of discourses make to effective debate structures. The thesis aspires to assess the opportunities afforded by Twitter to voluntary contributors to hashtags to reproduce and/or challenge the dominant gendered order, hence, Twitter's transformative potential. It also tests the efficacy of CDA and post-structuralist analytical tools to analyse Arabic discourses online and evaluate public Twitter discourses in the Saudi Twitter-sphere in which 'collective learning and decision making are at stake' (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:118). The online-generated discussions about women's issues may be 'gendering' of new discourses which may influence current discourses on the topics.

This chapter has endeavoured to unpack the major elements of the research project about how Saudi Twitter users renegotiate dominant gendered discourses on hashtag-debates on women issues. Major themes, controversies, and barriers to progress in the subfields discussed above have their implications in the present undertaking and these were taken into consideration in making decisions about methodology. Gender and power are understood as complex concepts which are multi-faceted with various levels of embeddedness in discourses. An investigation of how they are constructed socially in discourse requires a suitable data samples and an eclectic framework that is sensitive to context which will be detailed in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

After examining relevant areas of study, this chapter aims to provide rationales underlying the practical methodological decisions made during data collection and analysis. It starts with discussing the research design. Next, the data-collection section gives details about the extraction and measures taken to capture and prepare the pool of data for analysis including cleaning the dataset, selecting the data samples and tidying them. Subsequently, the hashtag contributors are described before delving into the analytical framework of the thesis. The adopted coding scheme drawn from CDA and post-structuralist frameworks and the analytical steps to be followed will be explained. The chapter then proceeds to consider anticipated outcomes, problems, and limitations as well as the ethical concerns raised by tackling data extracted from Twitter.

### **4.1 Research design**

To answer the questions that drive this research, this research is qualitative in its design embedded within the CDA framework. Being qualitative, it differs from Altoaimy (2017) and Almaghlouth (2017) who use a corpus-assisted approach to search-based Twitter data and blog data respectively. In addition to allowing thematic content to emerge through a Grounded Theory method, some quasi-statistics will be provided where appropriate to help mitigate the subjectivity of the patterns of central or peripheral discourses within the debates. One of the main features of CDA is that it does not have a fixed set of methods for data collection or analysis. As reviewed earlier, several sub-schools arose within both language and gender studies and CDA studies, and their methods in identifying certain narratives and/or discourses has been justified by their research questions. The selected pool of tweets derived from hashtag debates on two different topics related to women will be analysed by coding tweets to find and name the gendered discourses at play in these discussions and the relationships between them. After exploring those thematic discourses, the discursive strategies employed by Saudi tweeps for stance taking and their means of realisation will receive further examination.

### **4.2 Data collection**

The fast-paced communication environment on Twitter, the sheer number of participants and the possibility to predict trends have turned the platform to a source of

research data used across various disciplines. Despite the new possibilities that data derived from CMC platforms in general offer, they also pose several challenges in terms of the quantity, quality, and granularity of the datasets as well as ethical issues concerning working with publicly available data (Knight, Adolphs, and Carter, 2014). Datasets may grow too large, making it necessary to limit the data sampling for a feasible research practice depending on the research question(s). The same applies to issues regarding data mining and cleaning for research undertakings on Twitter. Analysts are confronted with decisions concerning multimodal messages, offensive language, codeswitching, spam, replies, or repetitions, which are caused by plagiarism or modified retweets. Finally, the question of who controls search results on Twitter is another important consideration, whether it be the system itself or the researcher. Search results may also be affected by misspellings. Decisions made regarding these issues will be addressed in the following sections.

In addition to its social significance in SA, as demonstrated in Section 2.3, Twitter's environment was chosen as the source of data in this study for pragmatic and contextual motives. Pragmatic motives lie in that it is explicitly public, "has relatively broad penetration across different ethnicities, ages, genders, and income levels", and encoded in a single format facilitating data collection (Bamman et al., 2014:139). Contextual motives include a tweet's 140-character restriction and the resulting condensed style of the disseminated messages, increasing the possibility of finding linguistic means realising various discursive strategies (Papacharissi, 2012:1989). However, it is considered a 'noisy' environment due to 'the disrupted turn adjacency' of its messages (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009:3). This noise is the result of the influx of users and tweets per hour, the speed and ease with which tweets are posted, and the order with which tweets are received by the server and then posted in reverse chronological order on the user's feed or Twitter's homepage (ibid). To gather Twitter data, software-supported methods were developed for data collection and analysis in the literature that are oriented towards academic (e.g. DiscoverText, Truthy) or commercial (e.g. Topsy, Twitonomy, Hootsuite) research (Borra and Rieder, 2014:262-3). Because it is a noisy environment, the use of Twitter data entails a data cleaning procedure following data capture and collection based on the research questions at hand. Data cleaning helps ensure the reliability of the data because one researcher's spam may be another researcher's data and spam can skew quantitative results (Borra and Rieder, 2014:270; Tsur and Rappoport, 2012).

Unlike Altoaimy (2017) who adopts a corpus-assisted approach to search-based Twitter data, the effect of misspellings and spelling variations within the hashtags' contributions is overcome because the coding was done without resorting to the search-and-autocode option. While Altoaimy (2017) employs a keyword-based dataset to create a corpus of Arabic tweets representing fragments from a wide conversation with diverse insights for a corpus-assisted CDA exploration, the present thesis utilises a complex hashtag-based search. It is found appropriate to limit the exploration to topics of interest to the Saudis and to enable access to the response of relevant participating audiences. Drawbacks of hashtag-based datasets were taken into consideration (Bruns, Burgess, Puschman, Mahrt, and Weller, 2013). Spam posts and noise were filtered-out and the argument that a hashtag only includes posts that were intentionally contributed by users demonstrating awareness of its previous presence does not seem to have an influence on the aims of the present qualitative endeavour.

After surveying the (dis)advantages of available tools for capturing and archiving Twitter data, it was decided to explore the investigated phenomenon by collecting data manually, i.e. by copying and pasting relevant tweets, and conducting qualitative analysis on a limited set of data instead of carrying out quantitative analysis on big data. This method means that it relies on Twitter's homepage publicly-available results and is still bound to its API's possibilities and limitations in framing what types of data appear as part of the sample as well as moulding the type of interaction enabled on its platform. It also takes Twitter's data sharing policy into account (Twitter Privacy Policy, 2017). It is important to note, that a dataset extracted from the same hashtags at a later point in time, might contain slightly different set of tweets than a dataset from an earlier extraction point, because Twitter users can change or delete their tweets at any time. Therefore, the two datasets should be treated as a snapshot of the dynamic and ever-changing debates in the Saudi Twitter-sphere. The next sections describe the procedures used to collect and process the data.

#### **4.2.1 Capturing the data**

The aim of this thesis is to investigate topic-tagged tweets from a group of male and female tweeps debating selected widely-discussed Saudi women-related issues. Therefore, Twitter was observed for trending hashtags in the Saudi Twitter-sphere during the month of June 2015, through following famous Twitter accounts that broadcast

trending topics in SA and/or ME, e.g. @KingdomRadar, @HashKSA, and @TheArabHash. These Twitter accounts nominate a hashtag as ‘active’ or ‘trending’ when a considerable number of tweets with the same keywords have been posted within a relatively short period of time. They rely on the Twitter-monitoring and statistical tools which are run for content dissemination, marketing, and promotion. Equivalents of these accounts do not exist in the UK’s Twitter-sphere.

Based on the nomination of these Twitter-monitoring accounts of active trends, 11 hashtags about women’s rights regarding mobility, marriage, work, and sports were selected. These hashtags were carefully chosen because they address ongoing debates about important issues that directly or indirectly affect Saudi women. Next, the selected women-related trending topics with the keywords listed in Table 1 below were entered as keywords into the search box of Twitter’s homepage and the “more” button, at the bottom of the “live” tab of the page, was clicked repeatedly to get more tweets until no more tweets were to be shown. At the time of searching, no Twitter user was logged on to make sure that the collected data would not be influenced by the preferences of a user, e.g. friends, blocks, trends, customisable promotions and ads, etc. However, sometimes, there is a limit to what Twitter keeps available. Thus, the topical hashtags were tracked for a month from June 8, 2015 to July 8, 2015 and the tweets were gathered on two occasions: first on June 20, then again on July 9 as the cut-off date.

*Table 1: Summary of hashtags about Saudi women as collected in June, 2015*

No	Hashtag	Translation	First accessible tweet	Trending Date
1.	#ضوابط_سفر_المرأة_السعودية	New controls for Saudi women's travel	June 7, 2015	June 7, 2015-
2.	#إصدار_جواز_دون_إذن_ولي_الأمر	Issuing a passport without the permission of a woman’s guardian	June 7, 2015	June 7, 2015-
3.	#حقوق_المرأة	Women’s rights	Dec 13, 2014	Ongoing
4.	#حملة_إلغاء_نظام_ولي_الأمر_عن_المرأة_السعودية	Campaign to cancel the guardianship rule upon Saudi women	Dec 30, 2014	Feb 6, 2015-Ongoing
5.	#عمل_المرأة	Women working	N/A	Ongoing
6.	#تأنيث_محلات_المستلزمات_النسائية	Feminizing the lingerie shops	October 24, 2014	November, 12, 2014-ongoing
7.	#قيادة_المرأة_للسيارة	Women driving	N/A	Ongoing
8.	#رياضة_الطالبات	Female students’ sports	February 24, 2014	May 20, 2015-ongoing

9.	#رياضة_البنات_بالمدارس_لن_تطبق	Sports will not be allowed at Girls' schools	June 26, 2015	ongoing
10.	#ثلث_السعوديات_عوانس	One third of Saudi women are <i>9anis</i> (unmarried)	January 18, 2015	May, 27, 2015--ongoing
11.	#مانبي_بنات_في_تويتر	We don't want girls on Twitter (meta-hashtag)	January 24, 2015	January 27, 2015-ongoing

The resulting tweets of the searched 'keywords' were then copied directly from Twitter's homepage and pasted into a *Microsoft Word Document* where emoticons and hyperlinks are preserved.

#### 4.2.2 Preparing the data

The resulting data was exported from *Microsoft Word* to *Excel* (.xlsx file) to prepare for uploading it to MAXQDA, the analysis software for coding and annotation. Therefore, another copy of *Word's* raw data was handled in a way that ensures creating a coherent dataset that would lead to interpretable results. This involved three steps. First, data was cleaned. Second, the numbers of relevant textual tweets, irrelevant and non-textual tweets were quantified to identify the hashtags with the most relevant textual tweets. Then, the numbers of male and female contributors whose gender was indexed were quantified to look for any patterns in them to help decide which hashtags to focus on before sampling them (c.f. Section 4.2.2.3 for details on how the gender identity of contributors was deduced). Finally, a procedure was applied to downsample before tidying the data to be uploaded to the analysis software as follows:

#### 4.2.2.1 *Cleaning the data*

The raw data pasted from the two hashtags to *Microsoft Word* were extremely long and messy. Therefore, unnecessarily repeated hyperlinks related to Twitter's workability and features, see Figure 1 below, were cleaned by using the 'replace' option of *Microsoft Word*. Empty lines and spaces were then deleted, sometimes manually.

*Figure 1: Pasted Twitter content of the selected hashtag before cleaning*



To choose an appropriate sample to answer the research questions, strictly unique textual tweets of males and females who contributed to the topic of discussion in two hashtag debates about Saudi women issues around their trending date were targeted and sampled for qualitative analysis. By 'textual', I mean that they were text-based and do not include a hypertext or embed an image or video, and by 'unique' I mean that the removal of any duplicates of these textual tweets was ensured. Therefore, modified, embedded, and picture retweets were removed because they had not been originally authored by the user doing the retweet. Advertisements and advertisement-like texts derived from trending hashtags statistics or unrelated religious scripts or supplications which do not inform any gender or discursive perspectives were also counted and moved to another document. Also moved were multimodal tweets with images, videos, and hyperlinks because multimodality may further complicate analysis (Fairclough, 1995).

Thus, multimodal tweets were excluded as non-textual tweets because they do not inform the research questions of the present study, which focuses on the gendered discourses, discursive strategies, and social action and actors invoked in debates about Saudi women. Multimodal tweets need a different set of questions and analyses that could not be addressed within the scope of this thesis.

Moreover, some tweets were duplicated by the same tweep or other tweeps in the same hashtag; so, the newer ones in chronological order were permanently deleted, and the original, older ones were retained, i.e. those with higher sequence numbers since the sequence has a reversed order. Furthermore, because this study is concerned with discourses produced within the SA contexts and by native actors from SA, tweets by admittedly non-Saudi contributors were removed from the pool of data. Their ‘non-Saudiness’ was indicated by them in their usernames, e.g. #Yemen, The Egyptian, or within the text ‘I’m Syrian, but ...’. From this point forward, the focus is only on the unique relevant text-based posts relevant to the selected hashtag topics.

Due to the large number of tweets and for reasons of practicality, the next step was to select samples that could be feasibly analysed qualitatively by excluding hashtags that did not use the adjective ‘Saudi’ in them and that was not still trending during the month of June. After excluding the hashtags related to sports, which do not directly pertain to women, but only to school girls, and the hashtag about women’s work because it included tweets not specifically addressing Saudi women, 8 hashtags were analysed in terms of the number and percentage of text-based/textual tweets in relation to irrelevant/non-textual tweets, see Table 2. So, it was decided to focus only on two hashtags with the highest percentage of text-based contributions trending within approximately comparable dates.

*Table 2: Analytics of the number and percentages of relevant textual tweets in relation to irrelevant non-textual tweets*

No	Hashtag keywords	1 <sup>st</sup> tweet	Last tweet	Trending date (2015)	Relevant unique textual tweets	Excluded tweets	Captured tweets
1.	#NewTravelControlsForSaudiWomen	June 7	July 9	June 7-8	1194 (81.57%)	270 (18.43%)	1464
2.	#IssuingPassportWithoutPermission	June 7	July 9	June 7-8	1317 (89.71%)	151 (10.28%)	1468

3.	#OneThirdOfSaudiWomenAreUnmarried	Jan 8	July 9	-Jan 18 -May 26	2325 (78.71%)	629 (21.29%)	2954
4.	#FeminisingWomensShops	Oct 24	Nov 12	Nov 12, 2014- ongoing	244 (51.26%)	232 (48.74%)	476
5.	#WomensRights	Dec 13	July 9	Ongoing	238 (54.34%)	200 (45.66%)	438
6.	#WomenDriving	May 31	June 30	Ongoing	703 (70.80%)	290 (29.20%)	993
7.	#CampaignToCancelGuardianshipRule	Dec 30, 2014	July 9	Feb 6- Ongoing	1218 (78.48%)	334 (21.52%)	1552
8.	#NoGirlsOnTwitter	Jan 24	June 30	Jan 27- ongoing	1509 (47.97%)	1637 (52.03%)	3146

#### 4.2.2.2 *Selecting the two hashtags*

The data shown in Table 2 above illustrate the quantity of the first three hashtags numbered (1, 2, and 3) in comparison to the other collected hashtags with fewer contributions in general and fewer relevant textual ones, meaning they have more tweets to be excluded. Hashtag number (2) started as the twin hashtag of hashtag (1) and was found embedded in most of its contributions, and thus it may not be necessary to treat it separately. The two hashtags (1 and 3) were thus selected for analysis for two reasons. First, the hashtags have the word ‘Saudi’ as part of their keywords, are related to two of the most-discussed issues of Saudi women, specifically mobility and marriage, and were launched as public reaction to news articles in other media. Second, the hashtags were trending during June and, apparently, all contributed tweets could be found available on Twitter. Therefore, these two hashtags contained the highest percentages of unique textual tweets that are relevant to their topic of discussion among the other hashtags as mentioned in the previous section. Accordingly, they may help give a snapshot of what goes on in other Saudi women-related debates at the time of data collection as hashtags that are readily motivated by a shared ideology of gender difference/dominance in their own right. As part of a substantial unexamined online activity in SA compared to other countries within and outside the ME, these two hashtags may have the capacity to reflect the changing dynamics of Saudi gender affairs.

The next step was downsampling the large number of tweets in both hashtags to analyse them. **Error! Reference source not found.** demonstrates the wide-distribution o



f participation in the two hashtags, which signifies that the debates are not dominated by the discourse of a small group of tweeps. Hashtag (1) had a single trending date, June 7, 2015, while Hashtag (2) had two trending dates: January 8 and May 26, 2015 and continued trending afterwards for a while. As a result, hashtag (2) was particularly long and, hence, needed to be broken into manageable samples of data for analysis based on the trending date as shown on Table 3 from the 1<sup>st</sup> trending date until just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> trending date, then from the 2<sup>nd</sup> trending date until the cut-off data collection date (July 9, 2015).

*Table 3: A breakdown of the participation in the two selected hashtags*

<b>Translation of Hashtag keywords</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> tweet</b>	<b>Last tweet</b>	<b>Text-based Tweets</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>Number of tweets after removing NA</b>
<b>#1: New travel controls on Saudi women</b>	Jun 7	July 9 (month)	1194	25	1169
<b>#2: One-third of Saudi women are spinsters</b>	Jan 8	July 9	2325	142	2183
1 <sup>st</sup> trending date	Jan 18	May 13	396	18	378
2 <sup>nd</sup> trending date	May 26	July 9	1936	123	1805
A month	May 26	Jun 28	1797	104	1692

The resulting numbers of Hashtag (2) were either too small or too large. Even after removing tweets whose authors' gender could not be identified, the total number of tweets was still not comparable to that of Hashtag (1). Since sampling from Twitter is contentious because the properties of its systems determine, to a large extent, selection and retrieval possibilities by defining basic objects (tweets, users, hashtags, etc.), their characteristics (140 characters, display picture for users, etc.) and actions (follows, retweets or likes, etc.), it frames what Uprichard (2013) calls "the ontology of the case". Hence, it was decided that only the first 1000 tweets of either hashtag were to constitute the analysis samples because it makes no difference what tweets appeared as 'cases' to be part of the samples in the first place, yet acknowledging that the different dates may do. Table 4 also provides the total number of contributors in these two hashtag samples. The next section attempts to contextualise the selected hashtags.

*Table 4: Number of contributors before gender-classification of tweets*

<b>Hashtag#</b> (1 <sup>st</sup> 1000 Tweets)	<b>Number of contributors</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>
Hashtag#1	664 contributors	390	274
Hashtag#2	716 contributors	257	459

#### Hashtag#1

Proposed as one reform to help the country meet international expectations of human rights, lifting the ban that requires Saudi women to get written/electronic permission from a male guardian is claimed to be a step towards facilitating women’s travel abroad. On Sunday, June 7, Major General Sulaiman Al-Yahya, Director of the Passport Department, held a press conference for the launch of “Your Passport, Your Identity” campaign. He explained that new laws are being formulated to facilitate women’s mobility. Women will also be allowed to apply for/renew their passport without the need for their guardians’ approval. To allow women to travel without it, though, involves other governmental institutions including Interior, Justice, and Social Affairs ministries, he affirmed. She would need to explain her reasons for travelling to the court to be given permission. The news divided the Saudis who have taken to Twitter to support, criticise, or satirise the impending laws.

As a result, the topical hashtag with the keywords: *#ضوابط\_سفر\_المرأة\_السعودية* (#NewTravelControlsForSaudiWomen) was launched on June 8, 2015 and it was pronounced as active and trending, e.g. by the two hashtag-monitoring accounts @Kingdomradar @TheArabHash. A survey of its tagged tweets shows wide participation in it that 1181 posts were tweeted on June 8 alone. This shows that this topic was highly debated in SA at the time it was trending. This is not surprising given that this topic is one of the issues with which Saudi women struggle. How long the topic was trending on Twitter and whether it will continue to be debated is not within the scope of this research.

#### Hashtag#2

In 2010, the Saudi Ministry of Planning announced that a survey conducted shows that over one million and a half of Saudi youth over the age of 30 were unmarried. It was calling for a better vision for the future of the Saudi family structure and inviting creative solutions to the problem. Again, the survey was conducted in 2015 by a faculty member in the Islamic University, Ali Al-Zahrani, for a charitable organisation (*Osraty*, i.e. ‘my

family'), and reported that the one and a half million have increased to four million unmarried youth. On January 18, 2015, an article was published in Saudi national newspapers (e.g. *Al-Watan*, *Makkah*, and the online *9ain AlYoum*) to remind people of the statistics announced in 2010 emphasising that over one million and a half of Saudi 'women' over the age of 30 remain unmarried, constituting about one-third of all Saudi 'females' (4.6 million). People reacted on Twitter launching the hashtag (تثلث\_السعوديات\_عوانس), #OneThirdOfSaudiWomenAre9anis), which was trending the next day, according to the famous monitoring account @Kingdomradar. Later, on Wednesday, May 27, 2015, the news was republished to caution people of the alarming drop in marriage rates and the writer Hanan Al-Hamidi highlighted the plummet in marriage rates on *3ain Alyoum*, an active Saudi electronic news outlet from 2010 to 2015. It announced that there were a Million unmarried Saudi youth in 2010, 3 million in 2014, and 4 million in 2015. The hashtag was trending again on May 28, according to another famous hashtag conversations watcher @HashKSA, and continued to trend in June. It retained the focus on 'women' although the gender of the singles in the original reports did not specify or compare the proportions of unmarried females and males. While some contributors reacted with dismay at the word 'عانس' /9a:nis/ being specifically used to refer to women in the hashtag itself and suspicion of the validity of these statistics, others were suggesting reasons and/or solutions for the phenomenon, sometimes satirically.

The word *9anis* and conjugations of it, i.e. *9anis*-hood, *9anises*, will be used in this thesis to make the image of women it evokes culture-specific and distinct from that of the depressing Western image of futile existence evoked by the near-English equivalent 'spinster'. In addition to the social stigma of being old and unmarried in Saudi, the word *9anis* adds other semantic meanings such as lack of support, financial and emotional, social vulnerability, and under-representation. Sentiments against the negative connotations of the Arabic equivalent were strongly expressed in this hashtag as female contributors rejected the application of the term in the hashtag to women alone while in Arabic etymology it was originally used to refer to men because they have the choice of proposing or abstaining from marriage unlike women who are at the receiving end. The second trending date was used to select the 1000 first contributions sample because its timing is comparable to the Hashtag 1.

#### 4.2.2.3 *Arranging the data*

The main textual-tweets file contained only the required information (display picture, username, date, post) and included the number of retweets and favourites. It was converted into a table and the tweets were given sequence numbers, even though the chronology of posting the tweets is reversed, to prepare for pasting its content to *Excel*. After pasting the textual data to an *Excel Worksheet*, they were reformatted into a useful data structure by adding a column for the deduced gender of the contributor.

As reviewed in Section 3.2.3, gender disclosure is normally a part of the virtual representation of the self (e.g. Huffaker and Calvert, 2005). Therefore, gender was deduced from the username and/or the display picture. In Arabic, gendered names, e.g. ‘Fatimah’ vs. ‘AbdulAziz’, and pronoun references to self, e.g. a feminine marker is added as an adjectival suffix ‘أنا أسف’ /?ana: ?a:sif/ (a male saying I’m sorry) vs. ‘أنا أسفة’ /?ana: ?a:sifah/ (a female saying I’m sorry), are obvious. This approach contrasts with Bamman et al.’s (2014) and Shapp’s (2014) use of the US Consensus data and gender probability to assign gender because the possibility of having a similar database in the ME is unknown. If not clear, the user account was surveyed for clues about gender through the descriptions provided by them under the ‘bio’ on their profiles and/or the content of the tweet itself, using pronouns for reference, inclusion, exclusion. It is not uncommon online that users experiment with changing their gender identity (Sloan et al., 2013). This was noticed when visiting the profiles of some contributors in the sample that their gender changed from M to F and vice versa during the phase of gender assignment. So, the identity represented in the data at the time of collection was adopted. It was coded as either male (M=1), female (F=2), or (N/A) when information about gender is not made available by the user. Because of the limited demographic information about users on Twitter, it was reasonable to start an investigation of gender and hashtag use this way.

After assigning gender to the contributors, the number of male and female contributions on the two hashtags was quantified. Table 5 below displays the numbers of contributions classified according to the self-proclaimed gender of the contributors, male and female, as found in the 2000-tweet dataset (c.f. Section 4.2.2.3, for a full description of the gender identification procedure). It demonstrates that the first 1000 tweet sample of #1 contained more contributions by self-proclaimed female users than their male counterparts. Female users contributed to 63.8% of the tweets in the sample. Hashtag #2, however, reverses this trend in that the contributions of male users doubled those of

female users. Male users contributed to 63.6% of the sample size. These results further supported the choice of the two hashtags.

*Table 5: Number of male/female-authored contributions to the samples*

Category	#1 (%)		#2 (%)		Total
Contributions by F	638	63.8	364	36.4	1002
Contributions by M	362	36.2	636	63.6	998
Total of Sample	1000		1000		2000

Such contrast may be implicated in the type of interests captured by the topics of the two hashtags. Men appear to be more interested in offering explanations and solutions for the phenomenon on #2, i.e. the high number of older unmarried/*9anis* Saudi women, encouraging multiple marriages or lowering financial demands during marriage ceremonies for example. They are less interested in defending or rejecting any new travel controls for Saudi women, possibly suggesting that they feel their male status and privilege are secure in the country, guarded by the patriarchal monarchy. The topic may also be considered more relevant to their lives and less contentious in political and religious terms.

The figures on Table 6 below support the two opposite trends described above but shows that there were multiple contributions posted by the same users. In the dataset of #1, there were about 664 contributors to the 1000 tweets sample, while more users, about 716, contributed to #2. The fact that some users tweeted more than one post in both hashtags shows how salient these topics are, even more so with #1 since it debates a basic human liberty while #2 is seeking to discuss a social problem.

*Table 6: Self-proclaimed gender of the contributors of the first 1000 tagged tweets*

Hashtag dataset	No. of contributors	F (%)		M (%)	
#1	664	<b>390</b>	<b>58.73</b>	274	41.27
#2	<b>716</b>	256	35.75	<b>460</b>	<b>64.24</b>
<b>Total</b>	1380	646	46.81	<b>734</b>	<b>53.19</b>

Overall, the fact that most contributors to these hashtag samples are self-proclaimed males with 53.19% of tweets in the full dataset of 2000 tweets with a minor difference in the overall percentages compared to female contributors, i.e. 46.81%, could point to the conclusion that female tweeps tend to participate in hashtags in a similar frequency as their male counterparts. This attests to the penetration of Twitter and its important role of its affordances, particularly hashtags, in facilitating equal opportunities for males and

females of all ages and classes to participate in social debates in the Saudi-Twitter-sphere. Although the number of female contributors is less than that of male contributors in the samples, the contributions of the formers in #1 outnumber those of male user. Hence, it may be concluded that the fewer females who participated in it were so emotionally engaged with the debate that they contributed more posts per user. These claims, however, need further validation in studies with bigger data.

Another content-based code is the linguistic code-choice or language variation. The majority of the tweets in the overall data are in Arabic, the variety of which ranges from Standard Arabic, the Classical *Fus-ha* that is the language of the Qur’an and early Islamic literature, to the widely used variety of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is adopted by literary works and the speech of mainstream media. The latter may be considered the ‘lingua franca’ of the Arab world, understood by all Arabs. Dialectal Arabic (DA), however, includes a variety of regionally-distributed Saudi dialects, namely *Najdi*, *Hijazi*, and Gulf, in addition to other dialects from the Arab world, mainly Egyptian or *Shami* (spoken in *Al-Sham*, i.e. land of the north, including Syria), the latter two were rare.

The distribution of language varieties in the samples, whose frequencies of occurrence are summarised in Table 7, reveals that most tweets are in the spoken DA variety of Arabic which is understood nationally and that written MSA comes next, especially among male contributors due to a tendency to draw on religious discourse, to simulate its authority, or to show a patronising tone that is perhaps a reflection of the dominant structured patriarchy. The prominence of the use of Arabic is consistent with Albawardi (2017) who found evidence of the phenomenon of diglossia in SA where shifts to MSA were found to be ‘strategic’. Arabicisation of English words, i.e. writing English words with Arabic script, seems to come next in frequency pointing to a growing trend of borrowing words from English into the language, because most of these instances were related to technology, e.g. hashtag, Twitter, c.f. Section 5.3.1, snap (for Snapchat), and global-market brands, e.g. Lexus, Prada, etc., some of which will be seen where objectification of women was involved, Section 6.2.1.2. Whenever any of these choices served other mes- and macro-level discursive strategies, they will be pointed to in the analysis chapters.

**Table 7: Language varieties found in the samples**

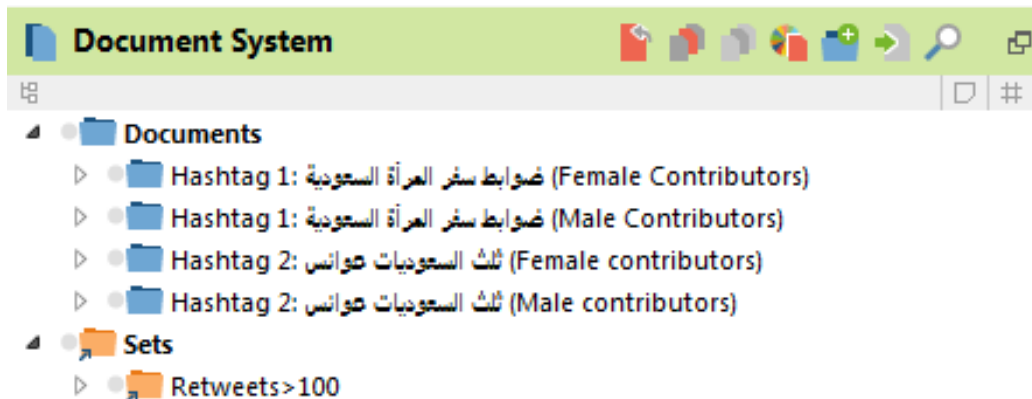
Linguistic Variety	#1		Total	#2		Total
	F	M		F	M	

1.	Saudi DA	424	180	<b>604</b>	253	291	<b>540</b>
	Saudi Najdi DA	1	0	3	1	3	4
	Saudi Gulf DA	1	0		0	0	
	Saudi Hijazi DA	0	1		0	0	
	Egyptian DA	4	0	5	1	0	3
	Shami DA	1	0		2	0	
2.	Written Modern Standard Arabic	214	<b>182</b>	<b>396</b>	111	<b>345</b>	<b>456</b>
3.	All English script	0	0	0	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>
	Code-switching/mixing	0	0	0	1	<b>7</b>	8
	Arabicised English (words only)	21	17	38	14	29	43
		#1		<b>1000</b>	#2		<b>1000</b>

### 4.2.3 Uploading the data

The data was imported into *MAXQDA*, a software for qualitative and mixed data analysis. The basic meta-data was made of the data types that were first imported, namely hashtag id (#1/#2), sequence number for the tweet (1-1000), user id, gender (M=1/F=2), and the tagged post (text). Initially, the software gave the option of marking the uploaded Excel sheet's columns during the 'import document(s)' procedure as either variables (\$), or auto-codes. Thus, four variables and four auto-codes were designated. The data types were renamed as document name (username), document group (assigned gender to the user), and retweets' and favourites' counts and were marked as variables. The selected auto-codes were the sequence number of the tweet, the document name, the document group, and the tagged tweet-text. The documents appeared on the software as Figure 2 demonstrates.

*Figure 2: The document sets as they appear on MAXQDA's document system*



Carrying out these two steps helps to give structure to the data for cataloguing/referencing and allows more analytical procedures to be conducted on the

data while retaining a gender perspective despite departure from gender-preferential speech features. It is necessary to mention here that emojis are the only form of multi-modality retained in the present research. Because they were lost when the data was pasted into the *Excel* file, they had to be manually pasted back to tweets that contained them one by one on *MAXQDA*.

### **4.3 Researcher's positionality**

As a member of the Saudi society, the classification of trends and discourses will be arrived at top-down analytically as 'grounded theory' in combination with the researcher's shared social and historical knowledge with the participants of the hashtags, including knowledge of the Arabic language, its dialects, the customary linguistic and social behaviour of its users, and the general social parameters they consider when they contribute to the hashtag discussions. However, as products of their social context, researchers also come with a package of conscious and unconscious mental models, beliefs, and values which may affect their judgment. Even though problem-oriented CDA analysts are not concerned with presenting themselves as neutral because, after all, all social research can be considered biased, especially as they align themselves with the marginalised (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, Liebhart, Hirsch, and Mitten, 2009:9). Hence, great care needs to be taken to maintain transparency of data collection and methodological approaches to maintain intersubjective validity. In addition, the provisional, interpretive identification and naming of the co-constructed discourses in the analysis will be offered up for scrutiny and further research. Salient discourses may seem common sense and self-evident, but a measure of explicitness and explanation will be retained to clarify them as well as the more obscure discourses found in the data.

Since an ideology-free view of the world is non-existent, the position, interests, and experiences that influenced the interpretations, whether theoretical, methodological, epistemological, or personal, were acknowledged and reflected upon in each chapter. I am aware that the adopted approach itself is subjective and may contain ideological predispositions, but I have attempted to keep interpretations as close to the text as possible through empirical analysis and cross-checking. I subsequently recognise that other methods and sources of data could be employed for identifying power relations between male and females and could come up with similar or conflicting findings. Additionally, my exposure to the competing voices within the hashtag is not intended to go as far as



taking sides or exercising the extreme of challenging the legitimacy of institutionalised controls by the government.

On the contrary, the purpose of this thesis is to problematise the non-explicit assumptions underlying the situation of Saudi women sparking debate from extreme perspectives about social gender roles in the oft-used hashtags about Saudi women that could pave the way to new vistas for women. Critical evaluations draw attention to alternative perspectives to received ways of thinking about a phenomenon, which can promote progress and change. The present evaluation of the situation does not end with this thesis. Rather, it is a starting point for an open discussion of the beliefs and assumptions that have not yet been uncovered to the public and whose social effects on women's lives ought to be reconsidered. Similarly, the ideas proposed in this thesis are open for debate as the discipline of gender and discourse in SA is just at its beginnings.

#### **4.4 Hashtag contributors**

The 'self-reported' information available online about a participant's age, gender, race, or geographical location is not reliable (Herring, 2001:621), which leads researchers to admit their reliance on the users' self-descriptions even though the lack of explicit demographic information does not entail that it is not predictable or implicit (Sloan et al., 2013). The population of the data are 'self-reported' males and females who voluntarily contributed to the two samples of the first 1000 text-based tweets in two trending topical hashtags during June 2015 to react to news announcements that are relevant to Saudi women in other media channels. Even though not possibly verifiable, most of these participants are Saudi nationals based on the information most of them disclose. The researcher describes participants as 'self-reported' because their constructed identity on Twitter will not be questioned in concert with the practice in CMC studies on gender (Cunha et al., 2012; Huffaker and Calvert, 2006; Madini and de Nooy, 2013; Sloan et al., 2013). In line with the current post-structuralist theorising of gender, gender here is not understood in terms of binary distinctions, rather as a social category indexed, performed, and negotiated in context.

#### **4.5 Analytical framework**

Discourses are different ways of seeing and grasping the world (Fairclough, 2003); they also structure knowledge and social practice (Fairclough, 1995). CDA as a method

was selected as the conceptual framework in the present thesis because of its practical toolkits and its commitment to ideological critique. It is an interdisciplinary method which can help approach the data from the broadest levels of the wider context through the intermediate level of social interactions and texts and to the micro-level of textual features and linguistic traces.

The basic premise of a multi-levelled conceptualisation of discourse, as both constituted and constitutive of social reality, necessitates a multi-levelled take on analysis. Therefore, to operationalise the concept of discourse, I draw eclectically from the following approaches as the theoretical frameworks: Sunderland's (2004) approach for the identification and naming of gendered discourses and the multi-located subject positions within them (Baxter, 2010), van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Action Approach (SAA) to understand the representation of social actors and actions where relevant, and the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to identify patterns of related discursive strategies at work in the sampled debates (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Wodak et al., 2009). However, patterns were allowed to emerge from the data, informed by a qualitative coding procedure that draws from a constructivist version of Grounded Theory with the polyphony and dialogism of tweets taken as a given. This is driven by the focus of world media outlets and some scholarly works writing about the situation of Saudi women on victimisation and subversion while the interplay of these dissenting voices with conservative voices that defend the status quo was overlooked.

Adopting this approach has helped to avoid the oft-accused bias of CDA being an emancipatory discourse in its own right, creating its own dominant discourse that dichotomises the powerful and the powerless or hegemony and outright resistance. Thus, this study is feminist in the sense that the selected hashtags provide evidence of ongoing social transformations in SA making them important to look at in this era. For data analysis, the coding procedure is akin to a constructivist Grounded Theory but influenced by CDA interpretive categories and social media features such as emojis and hashtags.

#### **4.5.1 Coding-based qualitative analysis**

Guided by Grounded Theory (GT) is an inductive method to provide a rationale for an empirically-derived theory, coding is emergent to avoid premature closure and gain the most turn-up of potentially relevant items to the phenomenon at hand (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Codes have a provisional character where there is no preference for a

single reading of the data based on a theory; hence, it is not a verification method. That means that explanations focus on both salient cases as well as deviant or critical ones to maintain the intricacy of situated meanings and the equal contribution of different participants.

Once the coding stage was completed, a close analysis of the retrieved coded segments in the data was conducted and a single storyline about the phenomena under study was developed, i.e. 'a brief descriptive account encapsulating the essence of what the research is about' (Fielding and Lee, 1998:37). This 'theory' unfolds from constant comparative analysis linked with sensitive theoretical sampling as a coherent 'abstract explanation of a process about a substantive topic grounded in the data' (Dornyei, 2007:261). When it reaches its maximum explanatory power, it can offer a better understanding of the situated motives, relationships, causes, and principles of the phenomenon. 'Theoretical sensitivity' is a term associated with GT denoting the different degrees of sensitivity with which the researcher(s) give meaning to the data and recognise what is pertinent based on previous backgrounds, experiences, and readings to reach a deep understanding of a phenomenon (Glaser, 1978; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The focus of Glaser's GT on induction and theoretical sensitivity was later modified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) into a more systematic and procedural GT that relies on axial and selective coding, which Glaser (1992) described as 'forcing data into prepackaged patterns' (Fielding and Lee, 1998: 38). GT's latest development is Charmaz's (2006) 'constructivist' GT, which was influenced by post-modernist and constructivist critique on mainstream qualitative research during the 80s and 90s, a remodelling that supports the requirements of accuracy and descriptive capture for Qualitative Discourse Analysis (Birks and Mills, 2011). It resembles CDA in its methodical procedures, i.e. data collection and analysis, finding traces of certain discourses by placing them into more abstract categories (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:27). It considers the researcher as a co-constructor of meaning as much as the participants are and allows them to become more reflexive in their practices, which is consistent with the CDA approach (Charmaz, 2014).

The constructivist Charmazian version of GT was found appropriate for generating the relevant gendered discourses and discursive strategies that describe how tweeps defend Saudi women's status quo or express subversion and dissent in social deliberations about them in the liberating technological context of Twitter and, yet, within the

restrictive wider context of SA. This decision is in line with the epistemological orientation of the present endeavour that is embedded within a constructivist paradigm. Being a member of the Saudi society and because of the sensitivity of the topic in that context, the researcher aims at accuracy and aims to include her interpretation as a 'viewer' as akin to 'the viewed' (Charmaz, 2000:510). Therefore, guided by GT procedures, the coding process in this thesis developed through continual exposure to the data maintaining distancing from it through abstract conceptualisation in order to achieve objectivity. When data was compared, concepts arised, when concepts were compared, categories or codes arised. This reiterative comparative analysis, between data and data, data and concepts, concepts and concepts, the analytic relevance of a variable which was not assumed a priori, e.g. gender, class, race, etc., emerged (Fielding and Lee, 1998). Indeed, the gender variable emerged from the present data as relevant. This was expected since women are the topical focus of the discussions in the two-hashtag samples in a hierarchically-based and segregated social structure as SA.

Thus, a macro- and micro-analysis will facilitate finding indicators of certain topics, discourses, and strategies, then grouping them into a network of conceptual categories supported with examples and occasional quasi-statistics. These frequency counts of linguistic traces can be relied on, not as proof, but rather as grounds to guide selection of what to include in the thesis and to argue for the plausibility of such analysis. Coding proceeded as described in the next sections. Until it solidified, it underwent clarification, simplification, and reduction whenever uniformities are noticed, and a smaller set of abstract concepts are formulated and integrated. The procedures of coding, retrieval of coded segments for observation, and the frequency counts were all facilitated by the analysis software.

#### **4.5.2 The naming and identification of discourses**

Post-structuralist theory was selected to interrogate the data and illuminate how gendered discourses and subjectivities represent and at the same time construct individual and collective gendered identities, supporting some identities and roles and suppressing others. Post-structuralist and critical theory focus on the reflective and constitutive nature of discourse embedded within its cultural context but seek to disrupt dominant meta-narratives. Accordingly, the self, both individual and social, and femininity or masculinity, are viewed as complex, fluid, and socially constructed. A social identity is,

thus, a site of ‘selves’ undergoing struggle and conflict as it is formed by numerous, sometimes contradictory, discourses.

In line with a post-structuralist, transformative perspective, Sunderland (2004) proposes the identification and naming of ‘gendered discourses’ approach which looks specifically at linguistic traces of identified or yet to be identified, i.e. emerging, gendered discourses. She distinguishes between descriptive, e.g. media, educational, informational, and interpretative discourses, as well as between general interpretative, e.g. and gendered interpretative, e.g. active man and passive woman, discourses. She further categorises the latter type, which is the focus of the present research, in terms of their functions, e.g. conservative, resistant, subversive, or damaging, and relationships to each other, e.g. competing, mutually supportive, dominant, or subordinate. These gendered discourses draw their meanings from their interdependence and relationships.

Gendered discourses position people in ways they may not be fully aware of or able to control or resist, which is why women need to be aware of the power of discourse in shaping their social situation (Sunderland, 2004:48). They are ‘responsible for initiating alternative or resistant discourses’ (ibid:78-9). It is a form of linguistic intervention when men and women deploy creative discursive strategies to disturb prevalent patriarchal discourses that they find damaging to them (ibid). This is in line with other propositions that resistant discourses open up possibilities for social change because dominant discourses influence people’s common sense and become ‘unwritten rules’ about how they should behave (ibid; Baxter, 2010:80). In relation to de Certeau’s ([1980]1984) notion of multilocations, the interplay of traditional and subversive discourses may lead to the modification of cultural practices, values, and beliefs (c.f. Section 3.1.1). Because of its relevance to stance taking, creativity, and social change against the backdrop of feminist and post-structuralist understanding of the dynamic relationship of gender, power, and discourse, Sunderland’s (2004) approach was found useful in identifying the various gendered discourses at work in the women-related conversations within the sampled hashtags in this study.

For a CDA exploration of the gendered identities negotiated in Twitter-based discourses that aims to assess its transformative potential in the Saudi conservative context, a discourse and creativity perspective is especially relevant. Sunderland (2004) and Baker (2014) consider comments, which relate women to men or compare between them, as pertinent for the identification of such gendered discourses and subject positions.

Therefore, the decision was made to sample hashtags marking debates about Saudi women-related issues as the ‘material epistemological site’ (Sunderland, 2006). Hashtags form a sort of social meta-data because they currently constitute a form of popular culture, a relatively new resource for deliberating issues surrounding Saudi women and their rights and the multiple, sometimes contradictory, constructions of gender relations. Such debates provide rich examples of ‘discursive instability’ where conventional and non-conventional invocations of dominant discourses and discursive strategies employed to construct or destabilise them may be identified. As a ‘conceptual site’, users seem to be boundary-crossing when they discursively struggle over the topics of women’s right for free travel or labelling women as *9anises* in a male-dominated context (Sunderland, 2006). Women and men are presenting stories about themselves that converge or diverge from those determined by cultural history that limits the identities they can assume. Disruption patterns of received ways of seeing the world are found evident in hashtags which may facilitate a transformation of the status quo.

Therefore, the present research seeks to investigate the discourses articulated in the tweets within two samples of hashtags to understand the constructed subject positions and power relations while embedding them within the Saudi social order. These discourses would not just describe the status quo, but also explicitly evaluate it, defend it, and/or clarify its purposes, or implicitly construct, perpetuate, justify, and/or legitimate it (van Leeuwen, 2008). Progressive discourses of equality, human rights, and independences form a part of the stories tweeps tell. The very presence of these competing or alternative discourses delegitimizing, or criticising conservative discourses proves the multi-locations users speak from on the platform, which makes hashtagged debates interdiscursive spaces where new realities for Saudi women are being imagined. The significance of identifying broad social discourses that tweeps draw on as interdiscursive resources results from the assumption that having these shared ideas and common beliefs makes communication possible (van Dijk, 2006).

#### **4.5.3 The social actions approach (SAA)**

A key framework in CDA is van Leeuwen’s (2008) work on ‘discourse’ as a ‘recontextualisation of social practice’ maintains a mutual relationship between language and the personal/social functions it serves in the world. To investigate a social practice, he identified seven key elements of social practice which may be manifested in linguistic

traces, namely social actions (verb types), social actors/participants (nouns, noun phrases, and pronouns), performance modes (quantifiers/qualifiers), presentation styles (dress, body, etc.), eligibility conditions, settings (place and time), and resources. He defined ‘the recontextualising social practice’ as a linguistic/semiotic action whereas ‘the recontextualised social practice’ may take the form of linguistic/semiotic action, non-linguistic action, or a sequence of both.

Various social practices may be embedded in hashtag contributors’ common sense regulating their gendered behaviour and relationships and these can only become explicit through a chain of recontextualisations, even though they continuously undergo a cognitive filtering process to adapt to relevant contextual constraints. Therefore, once relevant discourses were identified, this thesis focuses on the recontextualised social practices within them to inform the identification of the ideological positioning such recontextualisation reveals with a focus on pertinent representations of social actors who are invoked, and the actions attributed to them.

Stance may be transformed through this processed through deletion, e.g. exclusion or backgrounding of certain social actors/actions, substitution of certain elements of a social practice with other semiotic/linguistic elements, e.g. categorisation, activation, abstraction, symbolisation, etc., or addition of legitimations, purposes, repetitions, subjective reactions, or evaluations (van Leeuwen, 2009:150-1). Purposes answer the question ‘what for’ for the text and/or a social practice and/or the way they are practiced in various ways and various contexts while legitimations, or delegitimisations, answer to ‘why’ to explain the social practices or why they are done a certain way and such patterns will spread out in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, revealing how they helped to create a ‘multifaceted concept’ in what is known as ‘concept formation’ related to gender roles and relations (van Leeuwen, 2008).

The construction of purposes and legitimations are always discursive and are at the heart of controversy and debate. The discourses used as resources for legitimising or delegitimising differ based on the nature of the practice. That is the function of Chapter 5, to show what kind of topics go through the built-in cognitive filters to provide arguments of legitimations and delegitimisations. Their absence altogether also presents the social practice as ideologically-rooted common sense. (De)legitimatory discourses could utilise abstraction by generalisations or distillations or naturalisations for the de-agentialisation of actions and reactions. Evaluations are often linked with legitimations,

giving functional judgment of something as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘useful’ or ‘useless’, ‘beautiful’ or ‘ugly’, or emotional judgement as good or not. Evaluations link to normative discourses of natural or continuous progress such as ‘progressive’ or ‘innovative’, which may be interpreted as legitimations. Additionally, legitimations, naturalisations, and moralising abstractions of practices by distilling a quality from them, making comparisons, implicit or explicit, trigger intertextual links to various discourses of moral values.

Van Leeuwen’s (1996) theory of social action was adapted and those analytical categories were found helpful to capture positive/negative representation, construction, identification, and subtle forms of discrimination or exclusion found in the data. Therefore, besides the linguistic and semantic means found in the data, all pronouns and references/representations of social actors (to reveal nominations/negative vs. positive representation/evaluation/direct vs. indirect address) were coded in addition to passive and nominalised forms (to reveal mitigations of the locutionary force of a message, backgrounding or de-agentialisation of actors). This aided the identification of the discursive strategies, which may be patterned at various levels. Social-actor representation was viewed as one of the strategies manipulated by tweeps to express stance. Relevant categories include the processes of exclusion or inclusion, activation or passivation, nomination or genericisation, assimilation or differentiation, association or disassociation, spatialisation and categorisation (van Leeuwen, 2008). Categorisation was also employed to represent social actors by means of identifying them based on physical or relational features, on the positive or negative evaluations ascribed to them, which sometimes involve the use of metaphors and analogies in relation to objects (objectification) or animals (animalisation), or on their functions, in terms of role or occupation. Objectivation of actions by nominalisation, temporalisation, spatialisation, or descriptivisation can help to downgrade them and give priority to something else.

#### **4.5.4 The discourse-historical approach (DHA)**

As has been established earlier, there is a dialectal relationship between discourse and social structures in that it is constitutive of and constituted by social practice. DHA is “an exploration of the interconnectedness of discursive practices and extralinguistic realities” (Wodak et al., 2009:9). It combines a comprehensive set of linguistic constructs and a context theory to enable a systematic and abductive analysis of authentic data in



terms of discourse, context, and power (Kwon et al., 2014:266). It is a model that was built on Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) discourse-analytical approach to discrimination in their analysis of discourses about 'racial', 'national' and 'ethnic' issues. It aims at identifying discursive strategies which powerfully unpack 'strategy as discourse' and 'discourse as strategy' and shows how they are achieved through linguistic and rhetorical means (Kwon et al., 2014:266). They identified four macro-functions: constructive, perpetuating/legitimizing, transformative, and destructive/dismantling, embedding five strategic aspects: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation. The strategies may be employed for self- and other-presentation, for excluding the 'other', arguing for or against discrimination, framing, and showing involvement or detachment. An overview of the linguistic and tropological devices that could constitute the 'means of realisation' for these discursive aspects can be found in Wodak and Reisigl (2009:94).

Wodak et al. (2009:31-2) define the concept of 'strategy' as 'a more or less accurate plan adopted to achieve a certain political, psychological objective', which may not always be 'subjectively pursued'. Unlike Bourdieu (1992), however, they consider action (discursive or otherwise), not as equivalent to strategy, rather as realisations of strategies. They argue that the social activities of actors are conditioned by socialisation; yet, actors retain agency and maintain a degree of intentionality on various levels in individual contributions to discussions (ibid:32). Discursive strategies are; therefore, implicit goal-oriented behaviours used to manage knowledge and persuade (Wodak, 2007). Discourse is seen by Wodak et al. (2009:34) as constitutive generally in terms of 'macro-functions' or 'macro-strategies': constructive (of certain social conditions), perpetuating (strategies of legitimation and justification), transformative (argumentation strategies to transform a social structure into another), or dismantling/demontage strategies (derogation and disparagement without providing an alternative model), or topic-related 'micro-functions' of singularisation, assimilation, disassimilation, etc.

The notion of context in DHA and as used in this thesis takes into consideration the immediate linguistic co-text, i.e. the semantic environment of an individual word or linguistic feature in a tweet and of the tweet within the respective hashtag sample. As such, it includes the intertextual or interdiscursive references in the tweets and within the hashtag samples. Interdiscursive links are then pursued, whether they were allusions or evocations of religious or governmental figures, quotations, hidden borrowings, and

stereotypical formulations or arguments found in other media discourses and taken up in this semi-public hashtag discourse (Wodak et al., 2009:9-10).

On a macro-level, context focuses on extralinguistic variables of the wider Saudi social setting and the technological affordances of the specific online platform. Also considered within a macro-level of description are the ideologies shared socially by the Saudi society whereas a social tweep's opinions are of the micro-level (van Dijk, 2006:731). The linguistic representation of social groups may be manoeuvred to form, establish, perpetuate, or destroy 'concealed' relations of power and dominance, e.g. between men and women, or between religious authorities and their followers (Wodak et al., 2009). Two macro-strategies, namely 'positive self-representation' and 'negative-other-representation', are semantic devices that emphasise and deemphasise ideological meanings to create 'polarisation' of ingroup vs. outgroup ideologies/ US-THEM.

In addition to the integration of socio-cultural contextual information, DHA advocates for triangulation in methods and data. Triangulation of data may not have been possible in a qualitative study of data of this size, but triangulation of methods was allowed by the coding-based analysis and the heuristic adoption of the three methods described above where relevant, i.e. the discourse naming and identification approach combined with the SAA and the DHA models. The analysis of the data was conducted at three levels, though not necessarily presented in that order. A macro-level involves the wider context and theoretical concepts on which the thesis is based, a meso-level looks at interdiscursivity to uncover the broader discourses contributors draw upon while discussing issues related to women, and a micro-level targets the strategies, also possibly with macro- and meso-functions, and micro-functions as per their means of realisation. Since the coding process was iterative, it was felt best to avoid the macro-/micro- gap in the approach to analysis, which assumes a linear method, by integrating the meso-level to arrive a more unified analysis (van Dijk, 2015:268). The thesis follows Wodak et al.'s (2009:34) proposed discourse-analytical model where the analysis proceeds following three dimensions:

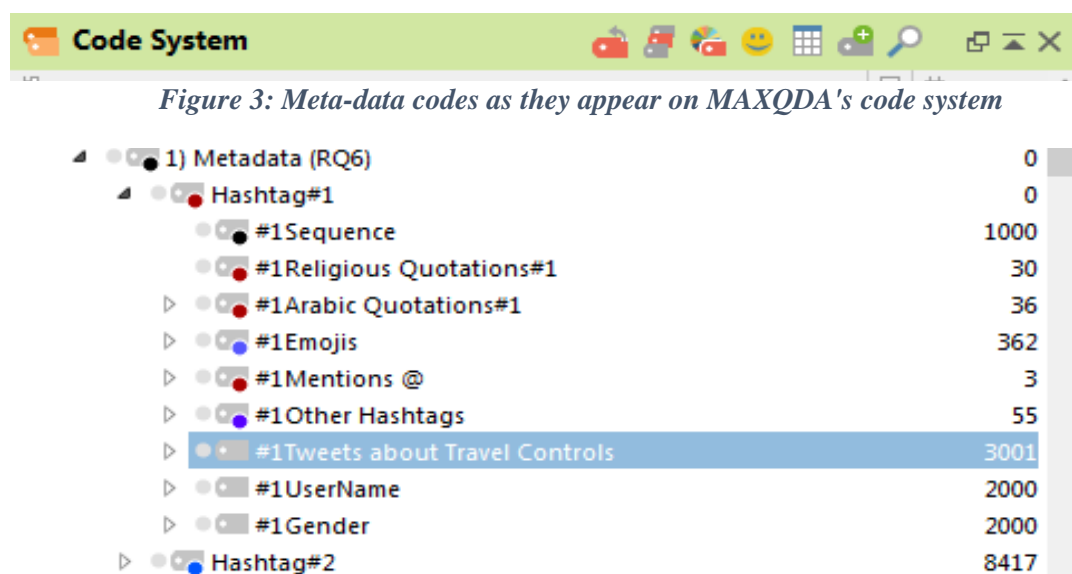
- Content presents an overview of 'major thematic areas' or discourses: how the issues at hand intersect with broader themes and dominant views in SA. Unlike Wodak and colleagues, the thematic content in this study was not specified in advance and were allowed to emerge from the data. This will be covered in Chapter 5.

- Overview of discursive strategies around the identified thematic content: their identification necessitates interpretive analysis of contextual and linguistic information and draws on relevant categories from DHA (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; 2009; Wodak et al., 2009) as well as the socio-semantic approach of van Leeuwen (2008), particularly the discursive strategies for representing social actors and actions and the construction of legitimation. The identified strategies may be macro-strategies, i.e. perpetuating, dismantling, or transformative, and the meso-strategies may be legitimating, delegitimizing, and may be involving singularisation, assimilation, disassimilation/difference, mitigation, or intensification. Some were found more frequent and significant than others. The two previous steps are not separate but rather intertwined. These will be the focus of Chapter 6.
- Means and forms of realisation: linguistic forms and means are the micro-strategies to fulfil the meso-/macro-strategies in the previous step. Linguistic and semantic means are considered as ‘types’ while their specific context-dependent realisations or examples are considered ‘tokens’ (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

## 4.6 Data analysis procedures

### 4.6.1 Applying meta-data codes

After uploading the data with basic meta-data automatically assigned, the most obvious features were coded. These codes included other hashtags invoked by tweeps in



the datasets, mentions, proverbs, quotations, emojis, and the placement of the main hashtags as the ground work for later analysis, as demonstrated in Figure 3.

#### **4.6.2 Applying topical codes and identifying discourses**

After reading the data to become familiar with its content, a provisional start-list of codes was created to steer away from a disorganised coding structure. Following action-oriented approaches to discourse as a social practice, my approach takes the starting point of Goffman's (1974:25) question 'what is going on here?' to explore what the role of the discourse is in the tweet to locate creativity in the actions of the users, not in their language (Jones, 2010). This involved interrogating the data with the following questions:

- What is being done in the tweet?
- What does the tweet say about the main hashtag?
- What other topics/discourses does this tweet draw on?
- How is the user positioning him/herself within the issue confronting him/her?
- What is creative about the way these discourses were manipulated?

Next, first-order coding proceeded with tweet-by-tweet annotation naming the thematic content to break the data within and across the two topical hashtags into topics and subtopics. To answer RQs 1, this thesis adopts Sunderland (2004) and adapts van Leeuwen (2008) to interrogate the data. Then, second-order codes were created to group topic-based codes into broader discourses that encompass them. The tweets were read and reread to identify gender-based discourses that the contributors were positioning themselves against. As discourse themes were identified, they were grouped and reorganised into networks of relevant and cascading levels. The process of naming and grouping these discourses underwent several formulations until their typology and names were settled. To articulate the social constructions of the involved social actors and the roles imposed on them by socially-shared identified discourses, social actions and social actors, pronoun references, and evocations were coded to tease out the salient linguistic features or discursive traces (van Leeuwen, 2009:149; Wodak and Meyer, 2009:29-31, 94). A full set of codes related to the naming and identification of discourses is found in APPENDIX I [enclosed CD].

Interdiscursivity deserves emphasis here as a meso-level feature in tweets and an indicator of related discourses within and between tweets embedded within the broader

socio-political-historical context (Sunderland, 2004:33; Wodak and Meyer, 2009:31). Discourses draw their meanings and make sense to people through their connection and strategic interdependence, i.e. dominant or marginal, subordinate or alternative, co-existing, mutually supportive, or competing, oppositional, or as members of a hierarchy underpinned by an overarching ‘capital D’ Discourse (Sunderland, 2004:47-50). Therefore, the constellations of mainly interpretive discourses/orders of discourse in terms of substance (topics), relationships, and functions were slowly captured through comparison and integration of similar codes (ibid:47-50).

Accordingly, the thesis proceeds to follow the three dimensions of analysis in DHA (Wodak and Reisigl, 2009). In Chapter 5, implicit and explicit traces of broader gendered discourses were grouped into broader categories in a straightforward manner guided by Sunderland (2004) for identification and van Leeuwen (2008) for the differentiation of the social practices involved. As established in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the mere diversity of discourses works to the advantage of the marginalised social groups, Saudi women in this case, because they open spaces for the negotiation of meanings and the exposure of hegemonic discourses at play (Moss, 1989:124).

### **4.6.3 Examining discursive strategies**

To answer RQ2, the identification of salient patterns of discursive strategies within the respective topics in the Saudi Twitter-sphere required working abductively between the RQs and the empirical data at hand. This exploration was informed by Wodak et al.’s (2009:34) four discursive macro-strategies of construction, perpetuation, dismantling, and transformation, and Wodak and Reisigl’s (2009:29) five discursive strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification or mitigation, in as much as they apply to the data. DHA was considered appropriate for its focus on context and emphasis on argumentation which help to conflate the hashtaggers’ communicative intents while embedding van Leeuwen’s (2008) theory of legitimation to understand some of the functions of discursive strategies.

To devise the methodological framework for this step, a micro-level approach to the investigation of discursive strategies was selected to parallel the adopted notion of discourse as socially constituted and constitutive. It starts by examining linguistic features including lexical choices or syntactic structures so that the strategic functions they serve may be examined (Bayram, 2010). However, it is important to mention that such an

approach to the strategies was non-linear. Therefore, in addition to some of the meta-data applied earlier, e.g. other hashtags, quotations, proverbs, and emojis, recurrent linguistic features and tropes such as imperatives, metaphors, laughter, mock suggestions, sarcasm, irony, euphemism, hyperboles, derogations, comparisons, and contradiction were coded. The coded segments of each of these features were reviewed to look for patterns of discursive functions and were compiled into macro-, meso-, and micro-strategies. These patterns also went through various formulations to allow salient discursive strategies to emerge while tweeps position themselves against the discourses they invoked in the samples, as will be presented in Chapter 6.

Gumperz's (1992) notion of 'contextualisation cues' was found helpful in understanding the function of various features as hints that inform the inferencing process to reach a plausible interpretation of the messages. Within the online discussions under study, these contextualisation cues, a concept reviewed under Section 3.2.1, reveal processes of (re)interpretation, resistance, anger, disagreement, bitterness or sarcasm, marked by linguistic and rhetorical devices that can illuminate the interpretation of the tweets as they shape and are shaped by the socio-political context. They can contribute strongly to a sense of the irreconcilably different points of view that characterise what a woman should or should not do, or how she should or should not be treated, and what kind of change is acceptable in SA. However, because contextualisation cues may be arbitrary and conventionalised or natural and non-arbitrary (Auer, 1992), they do not map to the same meso- and macro-strategies. They have guided the interpretation of the examples in the analysis chapters but could not be relied on to organise its presentation to avoid further redundancy of topics being reinforced or contested.

A full list of the codes representing the various linguistic and tropological means found in the data can be found in APPENDIX I [enclosed CD] and a list of the relevant strategies were summarised in Table 8 below.

*Table 8: A summary of the relevant discursive strategies to the present datasets*

1.	<b>Content-related</b>	Discourses/topics presented in Chapter 5 (Central/Peripheral)		
2.	<b>Discursive strategies (Chapter 6Chapter 6:)</b>	1.	Macro-function strategies	-construction, -perpetuation, -dismantling, -transformation

		2.	Meso- function strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-social-actor representation (referential/predicational strategies, stereotyping, or polarisation)</li> <li>-legitimation or delegitimation (of opponents (or their arguments), rejecting status quo, singularisation, or change),</li> <li>-intensification (to heighten the effect)</li> <li>-mitigation (to weaken the effect)</li> <li>-assimilation (emphasis on similarity of one entity with others)</li> <li>-differentiation (setting one entity from others as different/unique, e.g. women’s uniqueness, national uniqueness)</li> <li>-autonomy (emphasis on national similarity for unification) (Wodak et al., 2009)</li> <li>-heteronomisation (emphasis on how difference of the other from us)</li> <li>-humour,</li> <li>-emphasis on difference (comparisons/juxtapositions/appositions) and discontinuities to expose incongruities, through ‘discontinuation’</li> </ul>
<b>3. Means of realisation=Micro-function strategies (Chapter 6)</b>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-directness/indirectness using pronouns, nominalisation, passivation,</li> <li>-negation,</li> <li>-use of emojis,</li> <li>-hyperboles,</li> <li>-questions</li> <li>-expressing emotions, pride, laughter, flirtatiousness, dissent, etc.</li> <li>-presupposition.</li> <li>-rhetorical tropes: topoi/argumentation schemes, e.g. threat, comparison, consequence;</li> <li>- metaphors, parodies, ironies, mockery and narratives or scenarios</li> </ul>

The accumulated effect of answering RQs 1 and 2 helps build the answer of RQ3 in relation to the assessment of Twitter’s transformative potential based on the capacities it provides its users with to enable social change.

#### 4.6.4 Engaging in critical reflexivity and inter-reliability

Research design decisions regarding validity and reliability are linked to the nature of content and the role of theory in a research project. Codes may be applied to one of

three types of material: a) manifest, which is observable and ‘contained’ in the text, b) pattern latent, which points to configurations uncovered through recognisable manifest or low-inference symbolic content, and c) projective latent, which involves more interpretation to judge meaning underlying the physically present data (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999:259; Riffe, Lacy, and Fico, 2014). Latent content requires interpretation, which engages the subjectivity of the coder who brings context to the text, especially when it is absent as in written and online-mediated texts to recognise sarcastic or ironic comments for instance. Critical reflexivity is crucial for critical studies of this kind because interpretation and inference problematise the reliability with which codes could be applied consistently across time, coders, and circumstances (Riffe et al., 2014:94); hence, a reliability check to warrant the replicability of the present study was considered.

However, qualitative research may appear to lack standardised procedures to address issues of reliability and validity (Burla, Knierim, Barth, Liewald, Duetz, and Abel, 2008; Spooren and Degand, 2010). Riffe et al. (2004) point to three types of coder reliability assessment in content analysis: stability (across time: intra-coder reliability test), reproducibility (replicability across coders: inter-coder reliability test), and accuracy (conformity to a known standard set by experts), the latter of which is not always verifiable. Burla et al. (2008:117) argue that intercoder reliability analysis is not appropriate for low-frequency codes and for interpretive qualitative methods, especially GT-derived abductive codes, which do not exist a priori. Validity in the social sciences either breaks reality into distinct conceptual parts with observable indicators that point to their existence, and/or present a persuasive logical argument that links concepts in a way that predicts, explains, or controls that reality based on gathered observations (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

Within linguistics, intercoder agreement is absent in most corpus-based discourse studies and is discussed only in the computational linguistics community (Spooren and Degand, 2010). Similarly, no standardised procedures for reliability were found in most CDA and post-structuralist studies even though the interpretive processes of symbolic, non-literal, content are part and parcel of coding decisions. Researchers nowadays acknowledge that coders’ psychological schema has been built up through socialisation and is an integral part of their coding process (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Therefore, to achieve reliability a coding system needs to undergo revisions to ensure the



projected schema is intersubjective and is shared by at least a group of people from the same culture, leading to the discovery of a taken-for-granted meanings. Coder disagreements may be said to result from category ambiguity, coder's misapplication of the category's definition, or coder's background and frame of reference (Riffe et al., 2014). This step also helps generate findings that gain value with the public when they resonate with their experiences achieving ecological, or external, validity.

The codes in the present research are a mix of descriptive and theory-led interpretive codes. Meta-data codes, i.e. gender, tweet text, quotations of religious texts and proverbs, emojis, mentions, and other embedded hashtags, and manifest linguistic patterns of language use that help define the social actions and actors referred to in the corpus, i.e. pronouns, deictics, noun phrases, verb phrases, qualifiers, etc., are observable and objective. Abductively-derived codes pertaining to the identification of gendered discourses and the discursive strategies employed by users as forms of linguistic intervention, however, require cross-checking. The present endeavour does not need to make generalisations nor seek representativeness, rather seek to allow the varied perspectives on the research topic, i.e. Saudi gender relations, to emerge. To assure quality, support intersubjectivity, minimise bias, and increase comprehensibility and credibility, the data underwent an inter-rater reliability procedure as described in the following paragraphs.

Regarding the size of the sample to carry intercoder reliability checks, previous studies in content analysis and in communication suggest 10% to 25% of the data sample (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999:275; Riffe et al., 1998:109). Accordingly, to prepare for cross-checking, an initial sample of 10% of the whole corpus of 2000 tweets were considered enough, meaning 100 tweets from each hashtag (30 tweets from the beginning (1-30), 40 from the middle (481-520), and 30 from the end (971-1000)), i.e. 200 tweets in sum. This step takes the hashtag document set as a variable, but not the gender of the users. However, information about the gender of the user were retained in a separate reference file sent to the reviewers based on their request to aid with understanding the tweets, in addition to the main cross-checking Word file and code-book. The codes within the two interpretive levels of macro- and meso- analysis, i.e. the gendered discourses and the discursive strategies, constitute the core interests of this research (RQs 1 to 3) and require the subtlest interpretation. After removing the documents not included in the review samples, some codes contained zero coded

segments within them. These codes were retained because their very absence can be a source of (dis)agreement. After familiarising them with the objectives of the study and the definitions of the constructs of interest, three ‘educated adult Saudi citizens’ stratified to represent the male and female socialisation backgrounds in this study: two females academics and one male academic, reviewed the samples and recorded their (dis)agreements. Each reviewed the interpretative codes of a 100 tweets per hashtag.

During later review sessions, minor disagreements on the naming of a few codes (e.g. patriarchy into hierarchy) and their applicability to the coded segments were discussed and resolved as they arose with three purposes in mind: noticing biases and differences in perception and frame of reference, validating the presence of varied interpretations of the sampled texts, and stabilising the codes, their naming, definitions, and structure. Some tentative interpretation schemes that were developed needed to be abandoned or modified through reflexivity and especially after the cross-checking procedure was carried out.

A full account of the disagreements can be found in APPENDIX II [enclosed CD]. Table 9 below gives an overview of the results of the procedure and shows that there was little disagreement, especially in codes relating to discourse-naming and identification, specifically in #2, and none within the discursive strategies despite the two female reviewers being linguists. Accordingly, the researcher was able to proceed with the writing more confidently.

*Table 9: A summary of the inter-reliability process results*

#	Categories of codes	Codes	Coded tweets	Disagreements on coded segments		
				Female reviewer 1	Female reviewer 2	Male reviewer 3
#1	<b>Discourses</b>	19	335	10	12	13
	<b>Discursive strategies</b>	29	428	0	0	0
#2	<b>Discourses</b>	34	339	0	1	7
	<b>Discursive strategies</b>	34	416	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>116</b>	<b>1518</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>

The double review of the same sample is meant to shift the focus from agreement across interpretative codes to that across reader perspectives. It is worth mentioning that these analyses were also reviewed by the two CDA experts, the supervisors of the present thesis, and will later be judged by the thesis examiners. These three perspectives in a study of online communication correspond to the three validation strategies that Poole and Folger (1981) posited in the relevant communication studies: the experienced (the

external experts), experiencing (the socially-constructed reality shared among the researcher and reviewers), and the experiencer (the individual’s subjective reality) (cited in Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

#### 4.6.5 Presenting and explaining the findings

Based on the above, the writing process of the analysis chapters proceeded initially using tools provided by MAXQDA that gave an overview of what is in the data and guided the interpretation of patterns. One of these tools is the code-relations option which illustrated the interlinks and co-occurrences between discourses, between discourses and strategies, and between strategies in each sample. Through different levels of codes alongside summary matrices for data display and theoretical, definitional, directional, analytical, or reflective memos (Fielding and Lee, 1998:37-43), descriptive and interpretive analyses for each of the identified discourses, social representation and constructions were conducted and the core themes that integrate much of the data emerged. When the ‘core story’ was produced, it was evaluated and reflected upon against existing literature in the Discussion chapter.

Since the codes captured existing patterns in the data, examples were selected based on their typicality within that pattern to illustrate what is going on in similar tweets. However, during the process of writing, the adopted codes were found to intersect, making it difficult to map discourses and strategies into separate categories for presentation purposes. This overlap is illustrated by the following four tweets.

1.	#1F465	<p>الحين ماخلوك تسوقين لوحديك بيخلوك  تسافرين لوحديك .. ركزو بدواماتكم بس الله  لا يهينكم أبثرونا المرأة والمرأة 😞</p>	<p>Now they did not let you travel alone  how would they let you travel alone..  Focus on your work please may God not  humiliate you you annoy us the woman  and the woman 😞</p>
<p>To express a stance that is more on the pro-change side, this self-proclaimed female tweep responded to the news sparking #1 by characterising the status quo in terms of Dominance/Patriarchal Discourse in a way that implied her rejection of it. The ambiguous pronoun ‘they’ was selected to group the government and the male guardians together, which represents a shared discourse of SA as a masculine state, while emphasising the subordinate status women have by negation and the repetition of the word ‘alone’. She used comparison to link the discourse about travel with a discourse about women’s driving to dismiss the possibility of allowing women</p>			

<p>to travel without consent. To silence other contributors of the hashtag, she addressed them, with the imperative ‘focus on your work/get back to work’, indexing a work-related discourse. The double dismissal of change and other tweeps may be aimed to downgrade the importance of participation in such hashtags and promotes a moral value of efficiency. Sarcasm was employed as a strategy to dismantle the present differentiation of women based on sex, combined with an invocation of the name of God and an emoji to express fatigue with the hashtags’ focus on women, also emphasised by the repetition of ‘the woman’.</p>			
2.	#1M453	<p>فيه بنات متحمسات ف ذا الهاشتاق وليش #          وليش وهن ماعمرهن سافرن والوحده لو          يشوفها اخوها والا ابوها ف تويتر وطى ع          وجها</p>	<p>There are enthusiastic girls in this hashtag [and they say] why and why and they never travelled and if one’s brother or father sees her on Twitter he will tread on her face</p>
<p>For a conservative stance, a self-proclaimed male tweep indexed a meta-discourse invoking Arabicised forms of ‘Twitter’ and ‘hashtag’ using the Saudi dialect to criticise pro-change women contributing to #1, accusing them of hypocrisy and mocking them by parodying their questions on hashtags when they condemn their conditions, i.e. ‘why and why’. To perpetuate a circulating stereotype of women as irrational or controlled by emotions, he gave off traces of discourses of dominance and subordination suffered by women under guardianship. While confronting them with reality, he generalised that women in the hashtag never travelled before, suggesting that they illogically wish to show opposition. By derogating these women and inciting fear in them of their guardians’ punishment, he aimed to dismantle the suitability of gender equality discourse to the Saudi culture.</p>			
3.	#2F806	<p>وشو له تنزوج؟ يقيدك بكل شي لبسك طلعتك          ومافيه صديقات يفتش الجوال يشوف حقوقه          لازم تكون تامه ويقولك احمدي ربك سترت          عليك</p>	<p>Why should she get married? He restrains you from everything your clothes your outings and no [girl] friends he searches your cell phone and sees to getting his own rights in full and then he says thank God I covered you [I married you to keep you chaste]</p>
<p>For a more progressive positioning in #2, this female tweep dismantled the ‘marriage is important to women’ discourse with the rhetorical question ‘why should she get married?’ combined with a hypothetical situation of an unhappy marriage where dominance results in the restriction of the wives’ freedom. Notice how she started out by using the third-person pronoun ‘she’ and was not speaking of her own choice, and then shifted to the second-person pronoun ‘you’ to address other women in the hashtag. By doing so, she aimed to transform how marriage is understood by promoting women’s independence from the historical reliance on men for their livelihood. She</p>			

<p>also seemed to point to a shared discourse about Saudi men’s unsuitability for marriage because of the patriarchal ideology they hold and the adopted understanding of women as lacking control of their emotions/instincts and a rejection of a marriage that domesticates and possessivates women. The hypothetical situation also indicates, by quoting the husband’s command, that many Saudi men consider marriage a favour they offer to women to ‘cover’ them, another discourse about the need to conceal women, because they are ‘fitnah’ (a source of temptation).</p>			
4.	#2M959	<p>عوانس متزوجات مطلقات ارامل... يظنون ملكات كمملكتهن عزيزات كعز وطنهن وياصاحب الهاشتاق مت بغيضك ايها البائس ..التعيس</p>	<p>Spinsters married divorced widowed...they remain queens like their Kingdom dear as dear as their country and you creator of the hashtag die with your rage you the poor.. the miserable</p>
<p>To conserve the status quo, the platform-specific meta-discourse, again with the Arabicised ‘hashtag’ reference, was invoked by this self-proclaimed male user to address the tweet to the originator of the hashtag, who is evoked with the derogative comment and command ‘die with your rage you the poor ..the miserable’. This was aimed at dismantling the arguments of proponents of change in the hashtag. At the same time, the user perpetuated a discourse about Saudi women as queens, placing them on a pedestal, and speaking on their behalf. This defensive attitude, which was expressed in Standard Arabic to give it a sense of formality, indicates a shared rhetoric that women are considered representatives of SA’s upheld values, especially so since they were put in parallelism with ‘their Kingdom’, indexing a nationalist discourse. In the comment, women were defined in terms of marital status as spinsters/wives/divorced/widowed, which reiterates a discourse that domesticates women, defensive attitude.</p>			

This interweaving of discourses and strategies will make repetition and much cross-referencing unavoidable in the analysis chapters. Considering the complexity of the kind of struggle Saudi women, and their supporters, have with religion, culture, modernity, institutionalised masculine rules, and ideology and the post-structuralist approach adopted in the present thesis, this may not come as surprising and may eventually help to complicate the binaries projected within them.

#### 4.7 Anticipated outcomes, problems, and limitations

In keeping with early utopian views of CMC’s potential in facilitating activism and equalizing gender polarity (Graddol and Swann, 1989; Smith and Balka, 1988), Twitter serves as a platform for the presentation of diverse social and individual identities

debating and negotiating, sometimes contesting, dominant discourses. It has maximised the participation of Saudi women in the public sphere through affording them with a discursive space that has allowed them to overcome physical and cultural constraints imposed on them (e.g. Almahmoud, 2015; Altoaimy, 2017).

Through these debates, not only Saudi women but also some Saudi men consider that patriarchal discourses dehumanise or suppress women, hindering them from reaching their full potential, calling for a more balanced society. They also wish to be liberated from the burden of having to be responsible for the life affairs of one or more women in their families. This reflects that the community is undergoing a sort of ideological shifting that can lead to social change. As a result, men and women can intensely but slowly instigate social change through discursive interventions where the projection of diverse, sometimes conflicting, voices can be heard. On Twitter hashtags, they are enabled to contribute to levelling differences between such competing ideologies by the discursive strategies of similarity and difference, legitimation, or delegitimation, and intensification or mitigation to serve dismantling or transformative functions in their discourses so that new possibilities for women can be imagined.

Several precautionary procedures were adopted to ensure the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the present qualitative research (Dornyei, 2007). First, the software was used for coding and annotation to ensure more consistency and flexibility to experiment with the grouping of prevalent theme-based discourses and discursive strategies that were realised by linguistic or tropological means in the data. Second, gender was assigned to the users to maintain the gender perspective which helps contextualise the content of individual tweets, but the data was not divided accordingly to avoid being influenced by a binary division. Whenever the gender of the participant was not deducible from his/her username or messages, it was assigned as N/A. Although it would have been better to retain them to serve the non-binary approach adopted in this thesis, they were later removed from the datasets as gender ambiguous because of their small occurrence.

Third, to allow for a close in-depth analysis, the data may be considered relatively small, yet analysis of 2000 tweets in total, though not representative, was felt enough to draw conclusions about the discursive behaviour of hashtaggers that spreads over two different contentious topics related to Saudi women. Fourth, because the original data is in Arabic script and is specific to the Saudi culture, a decision was made to render the

examples cited at the analysis chapters using a semantic-translation approach, i.e. with a focus on bringing the meaning across to the English readers without any cultural adaptation intended to bring a similar communicative effect on them as the original text does (c.f. Nida's 'dynamic equivalence' in Nida and Taber ([1969]2003)). According to Newmark (1988:41), 'semantic translation' attempts to render 'the exact contextual meaning of the original' text as much as the semantic and syntactic structures of the target language make possible. It corresponds with Nida and Taber's ([1969]2003) 'formal equivalence' in translation. While it 'respects context', interprets and explains the source text, it does not differ too much from 'literal translation', yet contrasts with 'communicative translation' which aims at producing a similar effect, e.g. flavour and tone, on its readers as that of the original. These translations were later revised by another bilingual researcher to ensure that the linguistic choices and implicit meanings of the original tweets were understood and captured without much attention to making the translations sound as though they were originally native to English. Certain words that are culturally or religiously bound were preserved in Arabic, transcribed, following the transcription conventions found earlier (page xv), and their meaning were rendered in the nearest English equivalents.

Finally, it is understood, however, that generalisations of the discursive behaviours on hashtagged debates is limited by the number of tweets within the two hashtags, sampled as 1000 tweets each. The relatively small-sized dataset was mandated by the desire to make a fine-grained qualitative analysis feasible within the allowed time frame for the writing of this thesis. Therefore, the results that are discussed in the following chapters cannot be taken as representative of the entire discursive behaviour of tweeps and are best regarded as selective snapshots of debating practices in selected hashtags by Saudi males and females.

#### **4.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations and privacy matters regarding using the open-access discourses of social-media networks are still treated on a case-by-case basis. There are several ethical pointers, however, when dealing with collecting and analysing data from SM, including tweets. Traditionally, research studies prefer to make participants anonymous for the protection of their identity. It may not be common to engage with legal discussions of copyrights in linguistic research dealing with data from online sources, but

it is recognised that acting legally (cause no harm) is not always the same as acting ethically (attributing to user) and, in practice, there are many grey areas in between (Pihlaja, 2016).

SNS have blurred the lines between personal and copyrighted content as so much social interactions are going on and content is being disseminated. Rich discussions of research ethics have evolved in recent years (ibid). It has become difficult to distinguish what copy-righted material on SNS constitutes. Across SNS, there is a clear disclaimer to users that what they post can be accessed and used by anyone with an internet access. However, users do not read the terms carefully as they can be difficult to read for average users plus these terms change constantly. Users have different expectations regarding how others view or use their content causing blurry waters for the legal and ethical obligations of others.

Twitter is primarily designed to help users share information with the world. Twitter privacy policy states: “most content you submit, post, or display through the Twitter Services is public by default and will be able to be viewed by other users and through third party services and websites” (Twitter Privacy Policy, 2015). It is automatically designed for attribution of content to original user since the practices of retweeting and favouriting act as means to spread content (Boyd et al., 2010). Therefore, most of the information provided through Twitter is information one is making public (Twitter Privacy Policy, June 18, 2017).

Furthermore, there is empirical evidence that users are posting with the intention of reaching out to a wider public, that they are aware of their presence, and they orient themselves to having their publicly available content or comments be ‘liked’ and ‘retweeted’ (Pihlaja, 2016). After three case studies experimenting with deciding on how and when to cite online content, Pihlaja (2016) concluded that researchers play an active role in making decisions based on the focus of their projects, the wider context of their research, the expectations and opinions of the users whose content is under analysis. The principle is to ‘do no harm’ by acting and writing in a way that does not expose users for prosecution, criticism, or ridicule. Interpretations of what constitutes harm vary among researchers and contexts. Researchers have the choice to anonymise usernames (following the suggestion of Wilkinson and Thelwall, 2011) whenever users were not part of the research focus even though content can still be searched, and users be traced in case the content is still available online (Pihlaja, 2016).



Therefore, based on these discussions and because of the public nature of Twitter, no informed consent was required. The data is available on the public timeline and in case the post contained sensitive material and was cited as an example in the study, the users were completely anonymised by coding a TweetID but were not removed from the software so that several contributions by the same user within and across the two hashtags may still be easily related. This choice was made in consideration for users who are not always aware of the consequences of sending a post out (Baker and McEnery, 2015). Translation of data will further mask the users' identities. However, identifiable information about their professional and social contributions may be required in the process of contextualising their discourses and discursive practices. Guidelines on ethical and privacy procedures regarding the use of such open-access data may still be under formulation, but redistribution of any collected data is prohibited by Twitter's user agreement document. So, great care is taken to keep the data in a safe, encrypted location in a separate hard drive.

In summary, the data of this study consists of a dataset of Twitter posts derived from two hashtag debates about women's issues. This chapter has clarified the adopted procedures of data-collection, sampling, and analytical framework and processes. It has addressed the challenges encountered during these processes and how they were overcome. The data was analysed based on categories eclectically derived from CDA models based on their applicability to the samples and follow the three steps of DHA (i.e. content, discursive strategies, and linguistic realisations of them). The results will be discussed in the next chapters, but first, it is best to start by presenting a description of how tweeps presented themselves in the samples in terms of gender and language choice as well as in relation to the affordances provided by Twitter's service namely usernames, emojis and hashtags.

## Chapter 5: Interdiscursive resources for stance taking

This chapter investigates the gendered discourses at work in the social context as reflected in the discourse of the sampled hashtag debates and the relationships between them. The identification and naming of the gendered discourses drawn upon in the given context were made possible by CDA and post-structuralist approaches, mainly Sunderland (2004), while the underlying social representations were characterised drawing on van Leeuwen (2008). After a careful analysis of the data, users were found to discursively construct the two, rather specific, Saudi women-related topics, i.e. freedom to travel and the choice to ‘tie the knot’ (or not), in negative or positive terms drawing on broader discourses and underlying ideologies. Such evidence demonstrates that the two hashtags have created virtual spaces rich in shared gendered discourses that have had a normative effect on how men and women enacted traditionally-defined gender roles and expectations. For that reason, they were made relevant by tweeps in either hashtag sample and appropriated to express their individual stance on the issues at hand, expressing various ideological positions with or against what women perceive as their rights. The ‘creative’ effect of this appropriation is at the centre of this chapter.

The following discourses were identified in as much as they appear to be shared cultural resources that are pertinent to the Saudis, drawn upon by users to contextualise their comments or to exhibit their knowledge of them to establish affinity with other contributors within the debates. Invocations of each discourse and the underlying social constructions and assumptions are characterised, revealing stance taking, and explanations for people who are not familiar with the Saudi culture are provided. As these discourses were reproduced or reworked when tweeps were prompted by the issues at hand, some of them were central to the discussions while others were peripheral. Hence, the chapter gives an overview of a ‘capital D’ Discourse that reflects the traditional ‘patriarchal social order’, which includes ‘small d’ discourses that operate within SA to support it, and an emerging Discourse of Gender Equality. As discussed in Section 3.1.2, ‘capital D Discourses’ are systems of knowledge or higher orders of discourse signifying ‘ways of being in the world’ which integrate ‘small d discourses’, which determine the cultural affordances and constraints that control what individuals of a social context do or say (Gee, 1996:127). Hence, the capitalisation of ‘Discourse’ in referring to these broad systems will persist in this chapter.

The discussion of the various discourses evident in the data is accompanied with examples from either dataset. The cited examples, although single tweets, reveal how the contributors construct dialogue across tweet content and hashtag to shape stance. Sometimes, several voices are encapsulated in one tweet, that of the contributor and the addressed tweep or other unnamed voices. In citing Twitter posts in the analysis chapters, the two hashtag datasets will be referenced with the abbreviations #1 and #2 throughout the analysis chapters. The keywords of the main hashtags were removed from the examples to minimise clutter and to keep word-count in check, but whenever they are integrated within the comment, the abbreviations #1/#2 replace them. Examples will be referenced throughout by the hashtag and tweet's sequence number, e.g. [#1M504] with the disclaimer that the order of the tweets is reversed in its appearance on Twitter's page so that the first tweets in the two samples are numbered 1000.

To decrease clutter, the Arabic tweets were removed, and their English translations were retained and presented in tabular form, given sequence numbers based on their appearance on the chapter, which will be used intext to refer to them with traces of the discourse and linguistic evidence underlined. However, Arabic words that are culture-specific, e.g. *9anis*, will be retained, transcribed, and translated when referred to within the chapter. Explanations, equivalents, or background information not part of the original tweets will be marked by square brackets [-] in the English translations to distinguish them from the typographical choices of the contributor, which are preserved as strictly as possible. A full list of the original Arabic tweets/examples can be found in APPENDIX III [enclosed CD] with the same sequence numbers.

## **5.1 An Overview**

As the two social topics of travel and *9anis*-hood were being discursively recontextualised in the samples, they became sites for interdiscursivity to take place in tweets. Through interdiscursivity, where two or more discourses are drawn together, topic-related subtopics, old or newly created, are linked together (Wodak and Reisigl, 2009:90). Interdiscursivity in this thesis is manifested largely in non-hyperlinked, i.e. invoked linguistically within the comments' text, and, in lesser form, hyperlinked interdiscursivity, i.e. supported by Twitter-based affordances, namely mentions and hashtags. Through lexical traces or intertextual associations, it was easy to find and

aggregate, many, sometimes contradictory, discourses that were made relevant to the respective topics.

The centrality of the social constructions these discourses reproduce was decided based on their shared status with other members of the community through their struggle with and/or submission to them, i.e. they were frequently invoked. Table 10 below demonstrates the distribution of occurrence for these discourses and the basis upon which the ideologically-based ‘central’ discourses, including the other ‘small d’ discourses that sustain them, and the more descriptive marginal ones were determined, i.e. relying on the frequency of the invocation of these discourses in the discussions. Besides frequencies, the typology within Table 10 also makes Sunderland’s (2004) categories of discourses visually clear in terms of their relationships to each other, i.e. dominant, competing, mutually supportive, or subordinate, c.f. Section 4.5.2, without ascribing any ‘hierarchy’ to their order of appearance. The naming of these mostly overlapping interpretive discourses was discussed and agreed upon with the reviewers during the interrater reliability process.

*Table 10: An overview of the frequency of invocation of central and marginal discourses*

<b>5.2. Central gendered Discourses</b>	<b>#1</b>	<b>#2</b>
<b>5.2.1. A Discourse of Patriarchy</b>		
5.2.1.1. Discourse of the King as the national patriarch	69	93
5.2.1.2. Discourses of male dominance: the guardianship rule	775	411
5.2.1.3. Discourses of the subordination of women	576	473
<b>5.2.2 A Discourse of Gender Equality</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>5.3. Other related discourses</b>		
5.3.1. Twitter/hashtag-related meta-discourses	173	177
5.3.2. Religious discourses	133	127
5.3.3. Discourses about gender identity in SA	80	51
<b>5.4. Platform-specific affordances as interdiscursive resources</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>

It is important to stress at this point that most of the discourses below are invoked in the rhetoric of either topical hashtag for stance taking. Interdiscursivity within the tweets is viewed as a meso-discursive strategy employed by tweeps to serve the more macro-functions of perpetuating traditional ways of thinking to express a conservative stance, or dismantling, or transforming them for a more progressive stance. Hence, in terms of ideological position, there are basically two opposing groups in the sampled debates: ‘anti-change contributors’ expressing a conservative stance through the reiteration of broadly-shared discourses to preserve the status quo, or ‘pro-change contributors’ who

take a more progressive position through the re-appropriation, criticism, or transformation of these discourses to express dissent or project an urgent need for change.

Accordingly, when a shared discourse is drawn upon by contributors to perpetuate and justify existing gendered stereotypes and social roles, it will be designated as a 'conservative discourse', in the sense that it is meant to conserve the status quo. In 'progressive discourse', i.e. a discourse in favour of progress in the situation of Saudi women, shared representations of women were also invoked, to be challenged, mocked, or transformed. Despite a focus on these two broad positions to guide description, this thesis does not cancel the presence and potential of other voices that exist on a continuum between the them in line with the adopted post-structuralist non-binary perspective. It is important to note, however, that in presenting the identified discourses, overlap between them may be inevitable. Some discourses were used to prepare for or legitimise other discourses, e.g. religious discourse or stereotypes subordinating women, or to legitimise a wide range of existing or desired social practices. e.g. guardianship law or polygamy (van Leeuwen, 2009). Discourses may combine in specific ways to juxtapose past/present, wrong/right, or actual/possible for certain functions as well. Based on the sampled analysis of four tweets presented under Section 4.6.5, discourses of religion, culture, history, ideology, modernity, gender identity, human rights, dominance, subordination, and emotions are drawn together here showing the great overlap between the elements that construct the patriarchal status quo. This may explain the complexity of presenting the discourses and strategies found in them under separate sections and may reflect the complexity of resistance to the status quo of Saudi women.

To avoid repetition, this chapter is focused on the thematic content of discourses while Chapter 6 specifically focuses on presenting the discursive strategies at play within these discourses. Yet, it may be unavoidable to mention the discursive strategies employed to perpetuate or dismantle or transform them as the discourses and the strategies within them are inseparable. Any strategic appropriation of each discourse will be pointed to whenever encountered with occasional cross-referencing, for instance, when a patronising tone is added to a discourse in direct address to other users who adopt a differing ideology. What follows, then, is a retelling of an attempt to query discourses found in the gendered talk of hashtag contributors.

## 5.2 Central gendered discourses

During data analysis, all gendered discourses that surfaced seem to stem from a dichotomous understanding of gender based on biological sex. This makes a ‘Gender-Difference Discourse’ an overarching theme throughout the sampled discussions in the present thesis. It is so presupposed that it has become a shared common sense, not prone to contestation. As a result, there is a strong impression of polarity as well as hierarchy as will be demonstrated in most of the discourses described in this chapter.

This Gender-Difference Discourse may be a non-egalitarian, androcentric discourse, i.e. Gender-Difference-As-Dominance Discourse, because it is driven by masculine experience, considering it as the norm. This type of Discourse marginalises women and discriminates against them. Gender-Difference Discourse may also be ‘essentially’ egalitarian, admitting difference but calling for gender equality, women’s rights, and their independence from masculine control. Such a Discourse, too, was mutually invoked by pro-change tweeps to resist patriarchy or to be challenged by the anti-change group, the ‘challengers’ and ‘defendants of hegemony’, respectively, as Almahmoud (2015) calls them in her study about the driving-hashtag discussions.

Hence, under an overarching Gender-Difference-As-Dominance Discourse, a Patriarchal Discourse is found central to the debates, where many tweeps present SA as a masculine society. It is supported by two sets of secondary discourses that are ‘essentially’ hierarchical: discourses surrounding the guardianship law as a manifestation of male domination and privileging, and discourses that subordinate women, depicting or challenging a status quo where women are treated as second-class citizens without agency or power, minors, lacking in mind, or domesticated ‘queens’. These two sets are mutually-supportive discourses of a Patriarchal Discourse.

The interdiscursive links that the following sections will illustrate confirm that the general trend of closely monitoring and controlling women and their behaviour, while representing using damaging stereotypes clashes with the broad social tendency of allowing men more freedom and the minimum regulation of their actions. Yet, they constitute crucial resources for stance taking by the tweeps during the respective debates on the conservation-progression continuum. Whether the following discourses are invoked in a conservative or a progressive manner to defend the status quo and support patriarchal order or criticise them, they illustrate the extent and the limits of the users’

collective or shared constructions of what women are allowed or not allowed to do within the respective issues and beyond.

### **5.2.1 A Discourse of Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is a father-led familial/social system, that derives its masculine hegemony from a range of sources from force or direct pressure to consent legitimated by various ideological systems, e.g. politics, tradition, education, law, religion, language, customs, etiquette, etc. (Puechguirbal, 2010:172). As such, it dictates certain power relations between men and women; yet, it does not signify a constant competition between them at home or at work because it is not always understood in negative terms. Rather, it embodies a shared social construction of a social order or a set of social practices that 'may' - but not always - privilege male rather than female persons starting from within the family nuclei. In the Saudi context, it is indexical of male members' position in the family, or society at large, enjoying rights and opportunities that women may not be getting.





The discursive traces in the next three examples describe practices that embody the authority of a Patriarchal Discourse as a shared ideology held by their contributors. The use of the authoritative imperative form was used to impart a strict position where the tweep criticises the more liberal guardians for not controlling their daughters within the country, let alone abroad [1]. He cautioned against the freedom resulting from allowing women to travel alone by comparing the liberty granted outside the country to a painting that appears beautiful from the outside yet corrupt inside. Religious discourse, indexed by the invocation of the name of God and the Qur'anic notion of 'القوامة' /kawa:mah/ (male authority), was employed to argue for the essentialist vulnerability and fragility of women to justify their need for protection and service [2]. Another tweep asserts that, even if the government legally allows it, the guardians standing 'behind' women will protect them from 'getting lost' abroad by not allowing them to travel. Here the singular form 'the woman' is used to metonymically stand for the whole social group of women [3]. The topos of danger is also used to associate travelling outside the country with fear and threat. The three examples project a 'discourse about guardianship/*maHram*' and '*maHram* as protection discourse' that support the form of Patriarchal Discourse prevalent in SA, which will be further explored under Section 5.2.1.2.

1. #1M406 :- (Impose tight controls.. many custodians could not control the situation inside [their homes/the country], let alone the freedom whose beauty the minds have drawn [abroad]).
2. #1M487 Women, are by their nature, fragile and Allah [God, to be praised] gave man guardianship not as a prerogative but to protect, nurture and serve her.
3. #1M894 Even if the government allowed the woman [women] to travel, she will not travel because behind her stand men who are eager to protect her from a life of loss in the countries of corruption [abroad].

Not only do men think this way; some women believe in this power hierarchy, reinforcing it more by submitting to the demands of masculine hegemony and raising their children with this belief, helping their sons to gain validation for their masculinity through watching over the females in their households and encouraging the latter to stay mute and accept such authority. Therefore, the second discourse that underlies the Discourse of Patriarchy is a ‘discourse subordinating women’, which is justified by a religious discourse of *maHram* to raise suspicion against the intentions of other female tweeps’ who claim the lack of *maHrams* because one cannot run out of males in their family [4]. Or, *Shariah* law was invoked to silence advocates of freedom in defence of the status quo [5]. More examples can be found under Section 5.2.1.3.

4. #1F166 To that [girl] who wants to study abroad and does not have a *maHram*, all your uncles and brothers are finished!
5. #1F315 Don’t let this increase the Islamic *shariah* law and [the discussion] is over.

Such patriarchal practices stretch outside the family in #1, too, through attitudes and judgements that women voice to oppress and repress other women from expressing themselves. This makes it clear that women engage in the act of marginalising each other with the same patriarchy practised against them. They silence other women, motivated by a religious discourse that is normative of women’s behaviour alongside a topos of ‘love’ for the Prophet [6] or shared cultural definitions of women as uncontrollable on their own [7].

6. #1F713 Every  believing woman  knows the controls that the Prophet told us about, and if we sincerely loved him we would follow him  
without  arguing 
7. #1F839 Why are you upset they are right one should not travel except with a *maHram* or do you want to ‘go crazy’ abroad on your own may I get a nice trip that I enjoy [with my husband]

Patriarchy in #2 intersects with a discourse that negatively indicts the requirements imposed by the custodians of women for limiting their marriage possibilities [8], or for



not convincing women, whom they are entrusted with as if they were a possession, to accept polygamy [9]. Although these discourses continue to subordinate women, the patriarchal status quo appears to not serve the interests of males as well. Change here is desired, one that is not necessarily liberating for women.

8. #2M738 High dowries and fathers' greed for the jobs of their daughters this is what made #2
9. #2M637 They [women] are entrusted in #Saudi with their wali amrs so they have to beautify polygamy to them and to those who are capable of polygamous marriages, and their [women's] role is to accept [it] to reduce 9anis-hood

As the preceding example hints, being the guardian/custodian of several women in his family, and a potential marriage partner, the social system imposes too many responsibilities on a man to satisfy normative practices. In addition to 'beautifying polygamy for women to accept it', there are requests made by custodians that include dowry and marriage expenses, which can be very challenging. There is a model image of a man who is accepted as a suitor in marriage that men feel coerced to abide to. Men often complained because it is a form of social 'hypocrisy' that complicates relationships afterwards and takes them further from expressing who they really are [10]. This leads us to conclude that, although patriarchal practices restricting women are more obvious in supporting or dismantling arguments of the guardianship rule in #1, the society is criticised by male citizens in progressive discourses in #2 for being as patriarchal with them imposing traditional expectations, financial or otherwise, which can be overwhelming.

10. #2M478 You have to be a first-class hypocrite so that you reduce the percentage of 9anis-hood and trick the girl's family with your fake idealism and once you're married if you become blasphemous it is OK

A Discourse of Patriarchy was invoked for criticism in progressive discourses in #1 as well, e.g. when pointing to mothers' surrender to the fact that they are raising their sons to become their future guardians [11].

11. #1F236 In this country the woman raises her son from the cradle on what is permitted and what is not and the ethics, discipline, and respect and builds his mind because he will become a custodian on her.

Traces of a Patriarchal Discourse for a progressive stance are found in #2 where some tweeps reject the society's dictation of an age for marriage for a girl while emphasising 'the absence' of real 'manhood' is the real reason behind 9anis-hood [12].

12. #2F559 Welcome to 9anis-hood in the absence of manhood; I don't know really until when the society decides an age for marriage after which the right for marriage for a girl expires?!

Patriarchal attitudes adopted by the women themselves were criticised in #2 as one female tweep emphasised how pressure to get married has made her feel, a pressure mainly coming from female relatives and friends who attack her out of fear of her evil eye [13] or attempt to overprotect her by avoiding the topic around her [14].

13. #2F310 I remember once I was complaining to my close friend who was newly-married that I feel broken and vulnerable because of the delay in my marriage and she started attacking me out of fear of an evil eye!

14. #2F303 This feeling of shattering and vulnerability came because of the relatives the aunt and their daughters that they started to avoid talking to me so that I don't get hurt because of being unmarried

Because a Saudi woman is thought of as readily 'figured out', some contributors dismiss women who are pro-change with regards to the travel controls or those who claim enslavement. With a patronising tone, they were demanded not to mention that they are Saudis when abroad because, according to the user, they are 'disowned' by the country that applies *Shariah* law [15]. They were encouraged to change their nationality, as a presumably easier solution than changing the status quo [16]. In this way, sexist ideology, represented in male hegemony, is combined with a nationalist ideology that implicates that women are viewed as the representatives of the country's religious identity. Such arguments associated the focus on women's affairs with liberalist agendas that target the moral values of the country. It is noteworthy here how this tweep suggested that the practice of hashtagging itself is a waste of time.

15. #1F432 That who does not like to travel with her maHram when she goes abroad do not mention that you're Saudi the country that applies God's *shariah* is not honoured that you belong to it

16. #1F258 What goes on in your minds will not happen the country of the two holy mosques ..just rest migrate and take another nationality your life was wasted on hashtags 😊 I swear to God it's ridiculous 😊

At the same time, some female contributors expressed misalignment with the status quo with a similar proposition of changing nationality. One tweep offered to give up her nationality to object to the general focus on Saudi women in hashtags [17]. In a hyperbolic suggestion, another recommended it as an easy way out of this 'hypocrite' patriarchal society [18].

17. #1F596 Don't you want to give me 10 million and I give up on the nationality for you every couple of days you launch a hashtag and you have nothing else except the Saudi woman launch decisions that serve us

18. #1F1 The easiest thing to do for the woman here is to change her nationality to one that will give her rights because hope in this hypocrite society and its mentality and systems is impossible

#### 5.2.1.1 Discourse of the King as the national patriarch

A Discourse of Patriarchy manifests in a discourse about the King as the ultimate national patriarch. Repeatedly on national media would one hear a child, a teenager, or a woman mention the name of the sovereign prefixed by ‘ابا’ /ba:ba:/ (father) or a grown up calling upon him as ‘والدنا’ /wa:liduna:/ (our father). This means that Saudi nationals look up to the King as the ‘father’, someone they look up to help solve their national and, at times, personal problems. Even when replaced by the term ‘the government’, people mean to beseech the king, implicitly or explicitly, to find solutions for restricted mobility, low income, or unemployment. Table 11 demonstrates that in #1 this discourse formed one of the discursive resources female tweeps draw on in their arguments for freedom of mobility. This was not echoed in #2; rather it formed a part of the discursive resources of male tweeps, which is understandable considering its use to request governmental financial support. Despite the general infrequency of its invocation, it seemed to be a very relevant underlying patriarchal pattern in the two hashtags as exemplified below.

*Table 11: Summary of the invocations of the King as the national patriarch*

Total number of F/M tweets	#1 (travel)	Proportional frequency	Total number of F/M tweets	#2 (9anis)	Proportional frequency
F (638)	64	10%	F (364)	19	5.2%
M (362)	5	1.4%	M (636)	74	<b>11.6%</b>
Total (1000)	69	6.9%	Total (1000)	93	9.3%

The King/government was also addressed by pro- and anti-change ideological groups to support the way they believe women’s issues should be handled. On the one hand, the king was sometimes hailed in oppositional conservative discourses in #1 as the custodian who oversees the application of *Shariah* law in the country and an ally against liberalist agendas [19]. The government was held accountable for backing the culturally- or religiously-legitimated patriarchal structure against changes that are claimed to be imposed by foreign agendas [20].

19. #1F173 A woman’s travel without her custodian’s permission is impossible during the era of the King of firmness the Caliphate of Muslims #KingSalman.

20. #1F113 The controls are known in Islamic law and our great hope is in our King #SalmansResolution not to pass the agendas of the SEDAW and to forcefully impose them

On the other hand, the King/government were considered responsible for empowering women and treating them as human for the country to live up to global standards [21].

21. #1F108 State matters and its revival will not happen until the women [women] is treated as an active human being with integrity not a creature whose behaviours are suspected!!

Similar patterns exist in #2 but have more to do with the ‘requesting’ function. ‘*9anis-hood*’ is presupposed as a national problem and is therefore linked with other financial problems such as unemployment, low income, and high dowries as issues worth addressing by the government to encourage men to get married. Therefore, many male tweeps in #2 express a positive stance towards the role of the King towards to a change that is of service to them by hailing ‘@KingSalman’ or ‘King Salman’ to suggest that the government financially supports polygamous couples [22 & 23]. In doing that, contributors to the hashtags show an awareness that their comments are monitored and that their online requests have the capability of reaching governing entities.

22. #2M117 #ADecisionWeWishFor is giving a salary to every wife of a polygamous man similar to that given to the divorced women to encourage polygamy @ConsultativeCouncilSA @KingSalman
23. #2M189 I suggest to King Salman to give 100 thousand to every married man who wants to marry a second wife and 200 thousand to every wife who finds a second wife for her husband so that *9anis-hood* will disappear completely

Other users were suggesting solutions by asking the King to support men financially, i.e. by imposing limits to their guardians’ financial demands in traditional marriages [24 & 25], providing job opportunities and better income rates [25], and providing financial support for the polygamous men [26]. This discourse of money issues was recurrent in #2.

24. #2M662 If the dowry were limited to a maximum of 40 thousand Riyals all over the Kingdom will the rates of *9anis-hood* among the Saudi women increase?
25. #2M41 #ADecisionYouWishFor Providing jobs for all the unemployed [men] with an appropriate [income] level because unemployment is the cause of #2
26. #2M343 The government is supposed to impose on every married man to wed other three wives on the same night.

At the same time, the discourse of ‘the King as the patriarch’ was invoked to express a critical stance of the monarch/government on a national level in #1 by accusing them of

being patriarchy's strongest ally using taboo words as 'hymens' [27] or evaluative emojis for intensification [28].

27. #1F619 Why aren't there controls for the Saudi man [men]? They are more dangerous to other countries or is the government concerned with protecting our hymens?

28. #1F873 They [the government] let men on their own to control their women without any resistance and more [of such rules] is coming 🙅

The new controls state that in cases of unavailability, absence, or conflict, the government plays the role of a custodian to a woman. While this 'expansion' of the number of guardians controlling Saudi women's decisions was often rejected in the data by mocking the new system [29], the idea that all Saudi families are homogeneous was in some cases negated by providing proof that more balanced families do exist [30].

29. #1F719 The custodian was the only one in whose hand the permission to travel was, the new system converted the permission in case he was intolerant [hard] to all the ministries 😎🏠

30. #1F149 I don't know why they necessitate the consent of a custodian 🌐 Dad has given me the password for *Absher* [the official online consent system] and I gave myself the consent to travel the world 😊🌐🚶

The expression of resistance using this discourse continues as a user proposed that the government itself is perpetuating the idea that women are irrational by imposing these masculinised restrictions to privilege men and limit women's freedom while supporting male exploitation of them [31]. The new controls are claimed to be issued every now and then to fool women, and the developed world, into thinking that women are in the process of getting their rights back. Therefore, government is blamed for sponsoring a male-as-privilege discourse: 'وصاية ذكورية' (masculine custodianship over women) [32]. This is manifested in such 'travel controls' as advertised by the news to which #1 was a reaction, especially if the permission to travel comes under the authority of governmental entities as the news is often quoted to say for mockery. This argument was projected in the use of words like 'bondage', 'slavery', and 'dominance' to warrant a suggestion that a woman can save herself by changing her nationality to misalign with the status quo.

31. #1F835 They fool her with the new controls do you mean that you believe that the court will give her permission to travel alone I swear that the *Sheikh* [the judge] will tell her go home

32. #1F882 The era of bondage, slavery and dominance while they enjoy imposing their power on us may God have mercy on [the deceased King] Abdullah we shall weep over him all our lives except that who saves herself with a [different] nationality and gets rid of this

Relevant to this in progressive rhetoric is the frequently invocation of a discourse of SA as a ‘masculine society’, negatively describing the country as a ‘masculine kingdom’. To criticise the status quo, one tweep encourages the State to be transparent in its name by changing it to the ‘kingdom of males and female slaves’ [33]. Another mixes Saudi and Egyptian dialects to accentuate her mockery of men’s patriarchal fear of women’s liberation and women’s submissiveness to their hegemony [34]. This discourse is mentioned under this section but traces of it will be found in other discourses.

33. #1F139 I have a suggestion that you change the name of Saudi [the country] into the kingdom of males and female slaves for the picture to be clearer. 😊
34. #1F923 They [men/government] fear the elopement of women from the country of males [Egyptian accented phrase] \*don’t be afraid no one is running away\* except a few of the free [women] while the rest repeat two and three and four [an unmarked quotation from the Qur’an] and [pray for] God as the Bountiful, the Opener [of fortune]

Paralleling the role of the King as the ultimate patriarch in the country, every Saudi home has a male figure who runs its affairs, and the lives of the women who are under his guardianship, is held responsible for their welfare, and is to be blamed if they bring shame because he was not ‘ruling’ them properly. The idea that women should fully defer to men for permission to travel or marry demonstrates the patriarchal system in practice. The following section focuses on the guardianship rule and the resulting hierarchical relationship between males and females, i.e. male. This is intensified by the fact that positions of power in the public sphere are still mainly male dominated, despite recent reforms.

#### 5.2.1.2 *Discourses of male dominance: the guardianship rule*

Since the family structure in SA is traditionally patriarchal, the central Patriarchal Discourse forms a site for ideological conflict between men and women and between those who would like to keep the status quo and those who want to see the situation of women progress away from domination and hierarchy. Because dominance and

patriarchal social orders are best demonstrated in the male-guardianship rule that applies to all Saudi women by law, the contributors' ideological positioning on the conservation-progression spectrum revolves around 'small d' discourses about the *maHram* and *wali amr* as the domestic patriarch, reflecting the patriarchal type of leadership in the country as discussed in the previous section.

As established in Chapter 2, a male *maHram/wali amr* (guardian/custodian) is deemed necessary for the protection of women, for straightening their behaviour when needed, and for representing her in public spaces and governmental offices. Discussions of it are represented by the two lexical terms '*maHram*' and '*wali amr*'. A *maHram* 'محرم' /*maHram*/ is a guardian/companion/chaperon, male kin for a woman with whom marriage or any sexual relation is prohibited, i.e. a father, son, brother, uncle, or nephew. One of these *maHrams* is assigned the more controlling role of 'ولي أمر' /*waliy ?amr*/ (guardian/custodian), usually the father, brother, husband, son, or next of kin in that order. The *wali amr* is required to oversee her day-to-day needs and can take critical decisions on her behalf. He is a legal representative of her in male-dominated public spaces and she is required to obtain his consent, e.g. for the issuing of a passport, for marriage, and travel. He is addressed first by authorities when a woman is involved in any clash with any governmental entity such as the Law or the Religious Police. Also, when exiting prison, a woman requires a male relative for her release, which makes it difficult for survivors of domestic abuse to avail themselves. Previously, it was also the case to gain access to health, education, or work, but this requirement has been lifted.

While *wali amr* (custodian) is heavily criticised in the data, the *maHram* (guardian) is less so. The guardianship rule is criticised as the embodiment of dominance leading to a description of SA as a masculine State. As Table 12 below illustrates, invocations of male dominance discourse were manipulated slightly more by female contributors in #1 and by male contributors in #2. Because of the slight margin in the proportional frequencies, one can argue that self-proclaimed male and female tweeps draw on this discourse similarly for stance taking. As will be revealed from the examples in this section, this discourse was mainly drawn upon to express a desire for changing the present patriarchal practices.

*Table 12: Summary of the invocations of male dominance and the guardianship rule*

Total number of F/M tweets	#1 (travel)	Proportional frequency	Total number of F/M tweets	#2 (9anis)	Proportional frequency
F (638)	510	<b>79.9%</b>	F (364)	176	48.4%
M (362)	265	73.2%	M (636)	357	<b>56.1%</b>
Total (1000)	775	<b>77.5%</b>	Total (1000)	411	41.1%

Because *wali amr* is made responsible by authorities for decisions women take, this may lead to conflict between them and their custodians, violation of their freedoms, and suppression of their needs. Often, *maHram* can be invoked interchangeably with *wali amr* within contexts where travel is concerned while *wali amr* is closely linked to marriage, and other legal matters. This is also mirrored in the way the dominant male figure is represented in the comparative ratio of the mention of ‘*maHram*’ with ‘*wali amr*’ (126:121) occurrences respectively in #1 and (2:22) occurrences respectively in #2. However, in #2, many references to ‘*wali amr*’ were alternatively represented as ‘أب’ or ‘آباء’ (father/s). Another distinction is that *maHram* was found pluralised to refer to the fact that a woman can have any number of *maHrams*, but *wali amr* was pluralised only when attributed to plural female references because a woman can legally have only one.

Almujaiwel (2017) found that the topic of *maHram* in his corpus was mainly surrounded by positive patterns and that some women feel safer in his presence in situations where they feel vulnerable. This is attested for in the two samples only in as much as it was associated with protection. In #1, positive voices reiterated the mainstream understanding of the ‘religious’ concept concerning the need for ‘any’ male *maHram* to protect her while travelling even if the government allows her to travel with its permission [35] and the cultural ‘objectification’ of women with metaphors such as that of a valuable ‘gem’ [36]. Thus, the discourse about women’s need for protection (or control) by a guardian is linked to discourses of women’s irrationality and vulnerability, detailed in Section 5.2.1.3.

35. #1F99 Wonderful step to facilitate her dealings in the passports departments but in travelling she has to have a *maHram* with her not out of distrust in her but to protect her and protect her children
36. #1M462 The Saudi woman is a gem and she must be kept and one of the most important conditions for taking care of her is the presence of a *maHram* only, nothing else.



However, progressive discourses articulate negative voices that draw on the lack of consensus in religious discourses to delegitimize the controls in #1. That there is no agreement among religious schools of thought on either the presence of *maHram* or ‘permission’ of *wali amr* as requirements for women’s travelling or marriage is a recurrent theme by referring to the historical moment and social conditions when the ‘*fatwa*’ of the guardianship rule first appeared [37].

37. #1F64 Is it the case that when “some jurists” [first] produced the *fatwa* [advisory opinion] of the requirement of *maHram* “which is judicially disagreed upon” there was a passport and a permission letter that stop her forcibly or was she given the option [then]?

Yet, in conservative discourses, that there is more consensus on the unquestionable necessity of a guardian’s presence when a woman performs *Hajj* /Hajj/ (pilgrimage to Makkah) is drawn upon to create consensus regarding the guardian’s presence during travel [38].

38. #1F526 Isn’t it enough that she would be exempted from *hajj* [pilgrimage] without a *maHram* [if she had none] while it is obligatory and I marvel at those who speak about religion and if he could not find evidence speaks with opinion

This discourse is also criticised in #2 where women, particularly independent ones, were, by extension, associating marriage with ‘semi-men’ husbands’ thirst for control and dominion [39]. They suggest that, like men, they retain the agency to decide whether to get married at a certain age or to pursue their careers and that the keyword ‘*9anis*’ is a form of prejudice and discrimination [40]. It is a pejorative term intended to manipulate and patronise women by making them feel that their only way to get married after a certain age is to accept a polygamous or an incompetent husband [41].

39. #2F316 Traditions and appearances and love of control by semi-men is the cause [of *9anis*-hood] although the Saudi woman is known for her beauty and modesty, scarifying and loyal character.
40. #2F965 The word is prejudiced against women a modern woman’s ambition has surpassed marriage that’s why it is shameful that in our society a woman’s role is reduced to that of a wife only 🖐️.
41. #2F994 *9anises* is a term invented by the man to make the female accept any ‘troubled man’ to run away from the nightmare of *9anis*-hood “there is no such thing as *9anis*”

The authority given to *wali amr* to control what a woman can or cannot do has led to the possible victimisation of women that was drawn upon by negative voices in #1 through two types of discourse: ‘confrontation between women and their *maHrams*’ and ‘some women need protection from *maHram*’ when conflicts arise. To undermine male

guardianship rule, this possibility was emphasised because it puts women under the mercy of the personal traits of their guardians [42], whether understanding or abusive, violent, or merely passive or irresponsible [43].

42. #1F890 To sum all of this oh queens [is that] the custodian is required for travelling and everything which leaves you under the mercy of your luck with your custodian 😂
43. #1M345 There are respectable men [who are] the good luck of their daughters, mothers, and sisters and there are women who have no one they have bad luck and others [who have] in their lives men and their luck is very bad.

The mainstream generalisation of the ‘discourse of *maHram* as protection’ was rejected by affirming that some women need protection from violent *maHrams* because they can cause harm [44]. Accordingly, the new controls were occasionally celebrated since they assign the decision to court instead [45].

44. #1F11 To those who say that the *maHram* is protection I wish most men would just keep you safe from his harm and protects you from himself first!
45. #1F574 With her *maHram* [guardian] to protect her in rare cases we see the *maHram* a source of harm for the woman and the state allowed for a passport to be issued through the country which is a sound decision.



Furthermore, giving a woman consent to travel entails that her custody may be transferred from her *wali amr* (father/brother /son/uncle) to her husband after marriage, the court or the male judge in cases of conflict, as the news triggering #1 suggested. Both cases are problematic, resulting in a ‘discourse of battle’ between the genders that can extend beyond the household, when *wali amrs* allow others to intervene [46]. The resulting battle over control to validate socially-imposed norms with regards to what it is to be a man/woman is further explicated under Section 5.3.3.

46. #1F851 That means one [a woman] struggles to convince her father, her brother, or her husband then someone from the tribe intervenes and tells him no [not to let me travel] and he changes his mind...now it's the [Ministry of] Internal affairs and courts 🙄👊

However, although the following tweep expresses a progressive stance, she mocks the suggested court-based travel consent by bringing up, with a rhetorical question, how they will put the women, who go for this option, into confrontation with their guardians, since they are expected to live with their *wali amrs* after their return. Here, this change is perceived in negative terms, implicating the possibility of physical/emotional abuse [47].

47. #1F91 Without the permission of her *wali amr* [custodian]!!! The same *wali amr* that I want to come back from my travel and live with!!! Yeah right :)

In #2, the transfer of custody from the fathers to the husbands after marriage is ridiculed and rejected [48]. Simultaneously, the blind-nature of arranged marriages was presented in analogy with a watermelon whose colour inside cannot be predicted until it is cut open.

48. #2F900 As if [this] marriage will provide her a crystal [precious] life!!!  
From the hole of the father to that of the husband, new responsibilities, and a watermelon-like life which has a different colour and form every day.

When a woman needs to obtain permission from her male guardian for marriage, travel, or the issuing of a legal document, the outcome is limited mobilisation, objectification of her presence, which limits her role in society, and deprives her of taking full responsibility for her decisions. A loss of sense of selfhood results, especially so if a constant dialogue and mutual understanding are not established in the family. Therefore, in both hashtags the discourse about guardianship has intersected with traces of a discourse of abuse and exploitation, where women are forced to cover the travel expenses of their guardians to be able to travel. As such, a discourse of financial abuse is a resource for the subversion of male dominance in progressive discourses. Abuse in #1 is not only financial, the needs of a divorced woman may be neglected by her brother (and his wife) because, as her custodian, he can limit her mobility while he lives his life fully [49 & 50]. It is worth mentioning here that the following instances were contributed by the same user in the order shown next to the TweetID to relate her own personal experience.

49. #1F128 A divorced woman enslaved by a brother because of the death of the father and the nice thing is that the brother lets his wife travel but forbids his sister  
(1)
50. #1F125 In travelling with the brother she has to be put under the mercy of the sister in law so she does not get angry with her  
(2)

Abuse of guardianship in #2 is offered as an explanation for why women are not married since the guardians/fathers have their say in a way that influences, or even limits, their daughters' choices in marriage. Abuse can happen when the future of these women (and their suitors) are constrained by tribal compatibility conditions [51] or are exploited out of financial greed [52].

51. #2F1 Because of the tribal and sectarian prejudices and the white [woman] does not marry the black [man] and vice versa

52. #2M382 Some fathers if his daughter was working delays her marriage a few years so he could extort her salary may God not bless him

Hence, progressive discourses emphasise that this law is abused to extort or subject women by linking it to a ‘topos of progress’ because guardianship is claimed to render Saudi women as minors, which impedes any advancement in their legal rights. To undermine its institutionalisation, it is highlighted that it contradicts the fact that women are entrusted with the raising of new generations [53], also c.f. example [11] above. Occasionally, tweeps would further question the validity of the law by casting doubt on its application on women from the aristocratic or royal families [54].

53. #1M141 She gives birth to them, raises them, teaches them until they grow up to become her wali amrs and take custody over her. What wisdom is this.

54. #1F183 Now the daughters of Al Saud were they travelling with consents from their wali amrs?

The cumulative effect of such delegitimisations of the rule is that many pro-change supporters suggest that the government should abolish the guardianship rule to protect them from the abusive or restrictive control of their guardians. This request was suggested several times in #1 [55 & 56]. While most invocative patterns of the discourse about guardianship demonstrated under this section express a negative stance because it embodies male dominance, it should be noted that it is so salient in the two hashtag samples that it is expected to surface in other discussions of discourses and strategies.

55. #1M933 The only control is that it is her right to travel wherever she wants whenever she wants and however she wants and remove the masculine guardianship rule

56. #1F831 The cancellation of this consent is coming but these are introductions to ease the shock for the society 😊 May the cancellation of the ridiculous guardianship rule be next 🙌

The request to abolish the guardianship law was also present in #2 [57].

57. #2F245 Facilitate dowries and leave bragging and appearances remove the guardianship rule from every God-damn old man who trades with his daughter teach your children to take responsibility and that’s it 🙌

### 5.2.1.3 *Discourses of the Subordination of Women*

Within the central Discourse of Patriarchy, the discourses about the subordinated status for Saudi women represent the flip side of the coin of those about male-dominance. These discourses intersect while discussing the authoritative control of *wali amr* that could restrict women from living fully and practicing all their citizenship rights equally with men. The gendered representations embedded within these two sets of discourses

constitute rich interdiscursive resources for ideological positioning. Contributors appropriate their opponents' discourses for conservative or subversive aims. While progressive discourses of male dominance primarily focus on subverting the male-as-privileged discourse, those of the subordination of women mainly aim to demystify the traditional stereotypes of women that the conservative discourses perpetuate, representing women as the victims of the 'SA as a masculine State' discourse introduced in the previous section.

It is common that Patriarchal Discourses employ homogenising stereotypes to represent certain social actors or social groups, which circulate among community members through socialisation resulting in polarisation and the formulation of prejudices, both cognitive and social phenomena (van Dijk, 1984). Singling 'Saudi women' out with the travel 'controls' in #1 separates them from men and other (Muslim) women, showing them as 'different' or 'more fragile' and so need certain restrictions that are tailored specially for them. Branding a group of women as '*9anises*' in #2 is another strategy that serves as an excuse to practice prejudice against older unmarried women, perhaps to subdue and manipulate them. The mentions of traditional discourses that subordinate women to reiterate or subvert them in the samples are summarised in Table 13, which includes frequency counts of discourses about *9anis*-hood, polygamy, and women as queens, minors, or irrational beings. The proportional frequencies point to the prominence of such traces among female contributors in #1 and among male contributors in #2. These patterns could be explained by female contributors' rejection of the subordinate status imposed on them curtailing their freedom of mobility in #1 and male contributors' emphasis on women's irrational financial requests for marriage to explain their *9anis*-hood.

*Table 13: Summary of the invocations of the subordination of women*

<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#1 (travel)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>	<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#2 (<i>9anis</i>)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>
F (638)	386	<b>60.5%</b>	F (364)	143	39.3%
M (362)	190	52.5%	M (636)	330	<b>51.9%</b>
Total (1000)	576	57.6%	Total (1000)	473	47.3%

As mentioned earlier, the guardianship rule is traditionally legitimated by a religious discourse but is also criticised as a male-influenced interpretation of Prophetic teachings

(*Hadith*). It is said to render women as legal ‘minors’, while the society grooms them to accept that status by making them believe that they are being treated as ‘queens’ or ‘gems’. Their role in the culture that supports a mainstream Patriarchal Discourse is strictly defined in gendered terms as ‘domestic’ and in disadvantageous ways as ‘irrational’, ‘lacking in mind’, or ‘*fitnah*’, i.e. a source of temptation. The following sections will illustrate these stereotypes as manifestations of the masculine hegemonic representation of Saudi women to show how they are manipulated for stance taking.

#### Woman-as-queen discourse

A discourse representing Saudi women with the metaphor of the ‘queen’ aims, on the surface, to make them feel a certain ‘specialness’, a status beyond normal, a sophistication even women in other countries are simultaneously claimed to lack. It has been traditionally employed to stress their vulnerability but, at the same time, they are held responsible for the honour of their families and for keeping the peace domestically and nationally, that is by remaining ‘passive’ and ‘receptive’ of men’s ‘legal representation’, ‘marriage offerings’, and ‘protection’.

This metaphorical type of discourse is not quite alien to the Western part of the world as a ‘treat her like a queen/princess discourse’ (Baker, 2014; Keeling, 2012). Discursive traces of it passivize and disempower women while activating men as the knowers of what women need and empowering them to fulfil these needs. It is paralleled in the Saudi culture but on a wider social level, realised by the creative metonymic use of the words ‘ملكة’ /malikah/ (queen) or ‘أميرة’ /?amiyirah/ (princess) in different circumstances beyond the vivid representation it provides, to serve different purposes: to mock, to argue, to provoke, or to show compassion. Because this tactic disguises a clear deployment of the overarching common-sense gender difference discourse that stereotypes women as needy, demanding, precious, or worthy of protection, it goes hand in hand with the ‘*maHram* as protection’ discourse, especially in #1 where it is mainly used to subvert its traditional usage, cf. example [42] above.

The data shows that contributors were appropriating this discourse which is drawn from the very oppressive ideological system that has governed them, to ‘disarm the oppressor’ by cleverly playing on the multiple meanings of the ‘queen’, while, simultaneously, confirming their membership to the originating culture (Jones, 2010). By doing so, some tweeps subvert its traditional use and express a progressive stance and

expose awareness that they have been manipulated. A female contributor claims that Saudi women's main enemy is the 'queen' herself, as a metonymical reference that stands for the social group, i.e. those women who have unquestionably bought the notion of it [58]. This example reminds us of 'women beware women discourse' found in Sunderland (2004). The notion is exaggerated by pointing to how all the ministries in the country are alerted when the 'queen' wants to travel and appends that to a suggestion that if such treatment were imposed on young men it would have prevented them from joining *Daesh* (ISIS as a metonym of militant groups, c.f. 0) [59]. Appropriations of the queen discourse in #1 will be explored further in Chapter 6, c.f. examples [250 & 114]

58. #1F850 The primary enemy of the Saudi woman is the woman herself 🗨️👉  
the queen of course 🙄

59. #1F710 All the state's ministries are stirred in the case of issuing a permission for the queen.. if all these precautions that you put are for our male youth we would not find that one ran to join *Daesh*

This discourse was present in #2 mainly in its traditional sense, rarely subverted or destabilised. That this discourse continued the rhetoric of patriarchal and domesticating discourses reveals that underlying the use of the term 'queen' is a desire to keep and restrict women to the private sphere. It was employed to show compassion to *9anises* by emphasising their 'special place' in their fathers' houses [60]. It is occasionally perpetuated to undermine the generalised use of another term, the '*9anis*' [61].

60. #2M798 The Saudi female is a queen in her family's house .. A princess when she marries her knight.. Fate may refuse her giving up the crown [to become the princess] but this does not make her any less.

61. #2F520 Everything in paradise is more beautiful and life does not stop over a man that whose ambition in live is only a man call herself with that

label [*9anis*] The girl is a queen in her father's house 🌹

To sum, the traditional argument in the queen discourse goes something like 'because Saudi women are queens/princesses/jewels/gems, every evil force will try to reach them and so they ought to be preserved/protected, by laws, rules, guardians. Yet, it is implicitly meant to create an appropriate climate for a future of abuse of power, that is by gaining women's trust using a 'cultural signifier of romance', women are subjugated or coerced by consent (Baker, 2014; Keeling, 2012:1563). Obviously, this discourse has had a short life-span because women have become aware of the controlling motive underpinning its circulation in the society.

## Women-as-minor/lacking discourse

Accompanying the discourse asserting the dependence of women on *maHrams*, which gives them a minors' legal status, there is a stereotypical construction of women as 'ناقصة عقل' /na:qiSat 9aql/ (lacking in mind). It is recycled to justify or explain such discriminatory practices or prejudiced laws that subordinate women. Unlike the 'queen' which is specific to Saudi women, this stereotype has gained a metonymical function in its currency to negatively represent all women. Traces of the conservative invocation of such a notion are found in both hashtag threads. One tweep in #1 draws on a topos of threat and depicts the proposal of women travelling abroad alone as a disaster because they are, presumably, described by the Prophet as 'lacking in their minds', a decontextualised metaphorical text that is often misinterpreted and generalised in a way that is not attested for in the Qur'an [62]. Another tweep rejects women's travel for the same reason and suggests, as an alternative modern solution to female infanticide that was practiced in the dark ages, the use of birth control to limit the number of girls in a family [63].

62. #1M685 The women [women] is lacking in mind and this small and honest phrase [claimed to be from the Prophet] means that the woman travelling alone to a corrupted country this is a disaster for her
63. #1M624 The lacking in their minds and religion [women] travel [question] the solution in the past was female infanticide but now in a modern way by birth-control

To a lesser degree, there are traces of this representation in #2. The issue of *9anis*-hood is summarised by blaming women, who are 'lacking in mind' for their own lonely destinies [64].

64. #2M530 The girl who is proposed to by more than one groom and rejects based on her young age and that she wants to free herself for studies is lacking in mind when she is 35 she regrets and cracks her neck [in regret]

There have been subversive invocations of the phrase 'lacking in mind' to derogate 'perceived' opponents. In #1, it is related to how the authoritative figures of the court, i.e. the *sheikh*/judge who represent a masculinised interpretation of religious texts, view women. With the new controls, in cases of conflict or absence of a guardian, a woman's custody is transferred to the court and other governmental entities [65].

65. #1F194 From the humility of her guardian to the humility of a judge who sees her as lacking in mind 🙄



Criticism of the men's adoption of such a notion, emphasised by quotation marks, was depicted in #2 as an obstruction to the continuity and success of marriages [66].

66. #2F750 If the understanding of marriage of the Saudi male changed and he cancelled the idea “the woman is lacking in mind and is merely a machine for his service”, things will get better

This discourse was heavily criticised in #1 as women ascertain the subsequent systematic treatment of women as minors in their own country. To ridicule the suggested amendments of the travel controls, one tweep presented a hypothetical situation where a woman would be forbidden from entering court without her guardian, resembling the way they usually are in domestic violence cases [67].

67. #1F300 She goes the court to get permission and they tell her bring your wali [custodian] similar to cases of domestic violence.

The patriarchal system was often negatively evaluated and portrayed as unfair and oppressive [68], impeding the execution of women's affairs. For those reasons, some tweeps question its validity and reject being treated as minors, by association to children, or 'second-grade citizens' [69]. Relating a personal experience, a female tweep calls into question the rationality of making a woman's son her guardian despite her vital role in society as a professional [70].

68. #1F282 The most oppressive system against Saudi women is to consider her a minor at all times to need a wali or a custodian.

69. #1F213 Until when and the Saudi woman is a second-grade citizen, a minor creature who is treated the treatment of a child and is not allowed to take any decision for herself!

70. #1F948 Can you believe this! I am a medical doctor who is over fifty and I have helped thousands of women bring their babies to the world. I represent my country in scientific conferences abroad. Yet, my son whom I cater for is my wali amr [custodian] [and I can't travel without his permission]

In the same way, the description 'lacking in mind' was not as common in #2, but the resulting subordination of women was highlighted for criticism in progressive discourses. The patriarchal patronising tone was made clear with 'they tell us' and 'has to allow it' [71 & 72].

71. #2F995 .. Every time we say we want to marry from abroad they tell us that the non-Saudi will use you and wants the nationality as if we have a bank in our hearts

72. #2F23 Because her father has to allow it


## Women-as-irrational discourse

Underlying most of the above discourses is an essentialist representation of women as too emotional or irrational, depicting them as controlled by their instincts if they are left unattended or unregulated (by a male guardian). As such, this discourse corresponds with Baker's (2014:194) discourse of 'women as emotionally unstable'. In conservative discourses, this is another stereotype used to justify restrictions on women's mobility. This portrayal is so internalised that a self-proclaimed female tweep was raising the concern that any girl who wants to travel abroad without a *maHram* intends to carry out suspicious behaviour [73]. A negative stance against these women was also expressed when a male tweep claimed that he would not allow a woman to travel alone where she would be exposed to what he has seen abroad because, unlike her, he is 'more rational' or 'self-controlled' [74]. Another tweep questioned the intentions of women who want to travel alone relying on the 'lacking in mind' stereotype [75]. Because of the reference to the 'religious policeman' and the use of regional Najdi dialect while addressing these women, it is not too obvious, though, whether the tweep was being sarcastic and ironic or straightforwardly derogative. The phrase 'wearing *abayas* like the ones worn by maids' may be understood as an expression of dissent to the whole situation of Saudi women, the lacking in mind representation, the concealment, and the domestication.

73. #1F167 I mean the Saudi girl who wants to travel on her own without maHram where are you living my dear what do you want to get to relax [control yourself] may I be sacrificed for you [a Saudi accent of Najd is used here]
74. #1M424 As for me ... based on my multiple travels .. I am against the travelling of the woman on her own even if she were a goodwill ambassador because what I have not seen [abroad] is not little
75. #1M191 I swear he is right the religious police man you are lacking in your mind and beauty wearing *abayas* [women's traditional black dress] like the ones worn by maids and you want to travel who are you travelling for?

While a male contributor presented women as overly emotional and melodramatic [76], a female one naturalised the 'irrationality of women' in all issues related to them with a claim that they are so oppositional that they would want controls to be imposed on them if there weren't any [77]. Women's fondness of opposition merely to participate in controversial hashtags was suggested by another male contributor to enforce the depiction of women as irrational [78]. This discourse is pervasive that it is adopted by the female population because several of them came up with hypothetical conversations in court

explaining their wish to travel by an emotional desire to tease their friends, intensified with the dancing ballerina emoji [79].

76. #1M268 Crying \* crying on everything they want to prove themselves oppressed
77. #1F365 The woman is naturally stubborn if originally she was allowed to travel and not restricted you'll find them [women] calling for controls to be put! A first-class oppositional society
78. #1M869 I am sure that most of those women in the hashtag have not and will not travel abroad, it is just for controversy and dispute to participate and validate oneself
79. #1F970  What are your reasons for travelling?  Nouf has travelled to London and I want to go to Switzerland to tease her

Tweeps exploited this discourse in #2 to engage in blame-shifting while discussing the issue of *9anis*-hood, accusing guardians of imposing incapacitating requests and women of being too demanding. They projected a view of women as superfluous, since they indulge in material requests [80 & 81], arrogant and constantly discontent [82], thus, hindering their marital potential. They are also blamed for their foolish requests after marriage based on continuous comparison between their situations and husbands with those of others [83].

80. #2M853 If the expenses of marriage are decreased and you stop showing off, one could be with his wife at the age of 25 laying by the beaches in the honeymoon and thanking God for his bounties
81. #2M351 Be pleased in marriages and don't empty the men's pockets with the dowry and the wedding and the showing off and there will be no 9anises but a wedding that costs 180000 isn't it Haraam [a religious term meaning forbidden is used to mean 'unfair']!!
82. #2M77 The girls carry a big part of the problem and the reason is arrogance and pride and [constant] dissatisfaction
83. #2M921 The problem is the post-purchase expenses and the comparisons and the foolishness of some women

For blame-shifting as well, this discourse intersects with a conservative discourse about the influence of fantasy, fiction, and media on the youth to hold *9anises* responsible for their own fates. Based on masculinised ideas related to women's irrationality, women's marriage expectations can be easily influenced by romantic fiction [84]. Although [85] mentions both young men and women, the fantasy of the knight with the shining armour is particularly mocked. When the influence of TV and romantic fiction on women is highlighted based on the way many women envisage marital life merely as

a romantic relationship, their traditional role as domestic beings responsible for raising children with basic religious values is believed to be forsaken.

84. #2M876 What harmed the girls the most and the trick of the pink dream about marriage and the commitment to a person is the romantic movies and series..
85. #2M864 The reason is the ideas that MBC channels have planted in the minds of young men and women about marriage, love, and the fantasy of the knight ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

Discourses stereotyping women as lacking in mind, minor, irrational, too emotional, and, as a result a potential source of shame, aid the hegemonic practices that subordinate women under the authority of a male guardian. Yet, the following two tweets from either sample express a progressive stance by summarising this situation and attributing it to dated or ‘obsolete’ traditions and habits [86 & 87].

86. #2M491 Because of obsolete habits and laws and cultures .. unfortunately, the Saudi woman is suffering from the hegemony of a masculinised society, where she is the weakest link
87. #2M364 The feeling of shame towards *Hawwa* [Eve, i.e. women] who did not get married has reached a state where she is given a title and studies and research studies are conducted on her because of obsolete traditions and habits.

Consequently, the examples presented above suggest that there is a general expression of weariness with the social tendency to singularise Saudi women and focus on their behaviours or issues pertaining to them. At the same time, men are socially and institutionally privileged and their behaviour is rarely focused on or restricted within or outside the country; rather, their misbehaviour is often overlooked as ‘normal’ male behaviour, like ‘boys-will-be-boys discourse’ (Sunderland, 2004), or excused through a blame-shifting technique. Women are accused of being a source of ‘فتنة’ /fitnah/ (temptation) for men while, at the same time, being too financially demanding in marriage. This expressed awareness is a form of meta-discourse in its own right, i.e. a talk about talk. Though dispersed in the current and the next chapter, hashtag-related meta-discourses were particularly utilised for such and similar meta-commentary, as will be further demonstrated in Section 5.3.1. The women-as-irrational discourse is accompanied with invocations of contextualised definitions of femininity, further explored in Section 5.3.3, to keep women in the domestic domain and justify a need for ‘concealing’ them.

## Women-as-domestic discourse

A patriarchal definition of women's gendered role in SA was, until recently, restricted to the domestic life and expected to take charge of the coherence of the family. It remains the case, but her domestic duties are now supplemented with her job requirements. The latter, however, has not been given its due value as a social role. Still, a working woman cannot travel without male permission or company and must look a certain way when she does. For a conservative stance, many contributors to #1 argued against women's travel based on this domestic role limiting them to the kitchen space [88] and emphasising their subordination 'under' their guardians [89]. Women were expected to remain obedient to their husbands or else be 'flogged' [90].




- 88. #1M696 That she does not travel further than 0.003 KMs.. that means the kitchen is her farthest end
- 89. #1M679 No controls will stop the woman from being corrupted if she travelled without her wali amr the woman has nothing but her house and under the guardianship of the man for better maintenance of her
- 90. #1M937 The woman should stay in her husband's house and whoever wanted to be disobedient she should be flogged to be disciplined and goes back to the right path.

This domestication entails that women in #2 were defined in terms of their marital status. Women were shown to be put under pressure to get married since marriage is 'the only right destiny' for all women, lest they should be called '*9anises*'. Such a proposition is strengthened by a discourse about multiple marriages. Implicitly, girls are told that they are ordained to be beautiful wives, even as second/third/fourth ones to avoid suffering *9anis*-hood [91]. Polygamy was legitimated in #2 as the answer to single women's prayers by linking the topic to a religious discourse, here through the hashtag #WillOfGod [92]. 'Decontextualised' excerpts from canonical sources that permit the practice are often invoked even though they do not endorse polygamy or make it an obligation. Another way to legitimate polygamy was relying on the exaggerated number of *9anises* in the statistics spurring the hashtag debate [93]. As such, these legitimations further arguments that define women's role in terms of their marital status and their male-supportive function. These propositions echo the discourse of 'marriage is more important to women' and 'marriage is more important to women than anything else' in Sunderland (2004).

- 91. #2F701 The solution [for *9anises*] is that every man marries four.
- 92. #2M666 Among the solutions is that #TheWoman accepts a married man and accepts being the second, third, and fourth wife where is the problem as long as there is justice and equality this is #WillOfGod

93. #2M678 If this statistic is honest, then women must advise their like to accept the polygamous man [men] and accept that her husband marries again to fight *9anis*-hood

However, such a traditional definition was subverted in #1 by means of sarcasm through mock-suggestions, combined with emojis or hyperbolic ironies. Women's perceived domestic responsibility and attachment to their husbands, children, and kitchen utensils were represented visually with emojis as contextualisation cues that the tweet should be read as sarcastic [94]. Their home-related duties were suggested as additional controls to those already imposed for women's travel. The gendered restrictions imposed on Saudi women are such that an exaggeration about a woman's place was called for by suggesting that a woman should 'lock herself in her room' to please society [95].

94. #1F353 That she takes all her kids [as controls]  including the little one  and not forget her pressure cooker and utensils  what else remind me?

95. #1M414 And the society will not be pleased with you until you lock yourself in your room or kill yourself

'Behind' this discourse of labelling women as wives or in unfavourable terms as '*9anises*', there is a patriarchal discourse that is being resisted. It was mostly subverted in #2 where it was negatively evaluated as a manifestation of a masculinised culture that coerces women to fulfil a certain role [96].

96. #2M982 The masculine culture labels the woman [women] and decides her value based on her relationship to the man and how pleased he is with her 1- good wife 2-disobedient wife 3- *9anis*

Progressive tweeps were renegotiating '*9anis*-hood' in terms of a woman's right to choose a married life as opposed to her right to focus on her career and her independence [97] or rejecting the reductionist view of their role to that of wives [98].

97. #2M841 Don't bet your life on the time that a young man "decides" to propose the Saudi girl has enough pressure from society and its religious condemnations that she owes to them

98. #2F74 There is focus on single women in the statistics and the number of single men is not mentioned, because the masculine culture reduces the value of women with marriage only.

To summarise, many of the conservative discourses and stereotypes that subordinate women are perceived by the tweeps with a more progressive stance as discriminatory and damaging to women on both the personal and the social levels (Sunderland, 2004:194-5) and, therefore, are practices that represent Bourdieu's (1992) symbolic power. The legitimacy of masculinised ideas was frequently destabilised in the data by means of

direct or indirect criticism, e.g. laughter, as seen above and will further be exemplified in Chapter 6.

### **5.2.2 A Discourse of Gender Equality**

Based on the previously-discussed traditional discourses, Saudi gender relations are asymmetrical, perpetuating a construction of women as subordinate or inferior and, thus, deny them equal rights with men. The silencing or dismissal practises of the more conservative tweeps in the online samples further negate any equalising effect acclaimed to CMC platforms. Emerging, however, was a competing Central/'capital D' 'Gender-Equality' Discourse that is anti-discriminatory. It calls for the egalitarian treatment of women as citizens of SA, including freedom of mobility or the very decision to stay single or get married. The 'small d' discourses under its umbrella are mutually supportive, attesting to the presence of a certain form of 'feminist' discourses only in as much as they represent a struggle against the patriarchy practised in SA.

The nuances of a Gender-Equality Discourse in the two samples may be relatively difficult to pin down as it is a mixture of agony over or denial of the status quo and expression of desired social transformation. In other cases, it was both self-congratulatory over gained financial independence for women with careers and, sometimes, celebratory of 'minimal' progressive changes. Contributors mutually mentioned this Discourse to position themselves on the conservation-progression continuum. The conservative party indexed its discourses within the contexts of critique or mockery to dismantle them and defend the status quo. In a few cases, this Discourse became the villain as the conservative party were safeguarding the mainstream 'Gender-as-Dominance' Discourse and expressing their contempt for 'liberals'. They associated their opponents with foreign agendas that target the very fabric of the Saudi society through its most 'proclaimed' vulnerable group, i.e. women. While doing so, they were discussing women's rights as 'natural' human rights, advocating the independence of women as productive members of the society, and celebrating their contributions and achievements at home and abroad, often detached from radical opposition or any feminist/liberalist agendas. The discourses that will be explicated in this section support each other, since the humanitarian view holds men and women as equal, responsible, and independent, complementing each other's roles in every social structure.

Table 14 below demonstrates that male and female contributors in #1 drew on this interdiscursive resource almost similarly. Despite the number of contributions by female tweeps being about half the number of their male counterparts in #2, however, most egalitarian discourses were invoked by the female tweeps and were brought into the discussion more often in #1.

*Table 14: Summary of the invocations of Gender Equality*

<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#1 (travel)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>	<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#2 (9anis)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>
F (638)	199	<b>31.2%</b>	F (364)	163	<b>44.8%</b>
M (362)	108	29.8%	M (636)	107	16.8%
Total (1000)	307	<b>30.7%</b>	Total (1000)	270	27%

Since the Saudis do not consider the limitations imposed on women to be discriminatory practices, the restrictions are supported by (mis)interpretations of religious texts that are meant to regulate the distribution of gendered duties and rights. Women are expected to conform, keep the family together, and represent the country's devotion to uphold traditional and religious values. Therefore, since independence means that an individual does not define themselves in relation to the group or the other sex, it creates anti-conformity sentiments. Where Saudi women's independence was mentioned in #1, it was related to their emancipation from travel restrictions, a 'right' to free mobility they believe should not have been taken [99]. Having to look for a *maHram* for consent or companionship was often depicted as a dilemma that merits asking for 'mercy' [100].

**99.** #1F233 First time to hear that rights have controls! **This is my right as a human being who allowed you to put controls for it from the start who allowed you to take it away from me!**

**100.** #1F939 There should be rights for us I'm tired of looking for a *maHram* have mercy on us 🙏

Only by regaining their independence can women transcend their secondary status, climb up the ladder, and have the power to make bottom-up change happen. A discourse of independence attempts to negate discourses that represent women as 'lacking', 'irrational', and 'domestic', or renders them as legal 'minor'. Since these subordinating discourses are embodied in the guardianship control, it was often questioned in egalitarian discourses [101]. Despite the importance of 'financial independence', it is insufficient and 'legal independence' remains necessary to empower women and not treat them as a



‘burden’. These arguments link to the discourse about the desired removal of guardianship rule on Saudi women.

**101.** #1F277 The problem is even if she became financially independent, without legal independence and without the removal of the guardianship system she will still be treated as a burden ....

Equalising discourses call for women to be independent in #2, too, by emphasising their right to ‘choose’ their partners, which is not possible since they are at the receiving end of proposals. This lack of agency was questioned and rationalised as illogical in analogy to people’s natural selectiveness of friends [102].

**102.** #2F338 Why isn’t it a girl’s right to choose her partner? In friendship, dating, and love she would not accept or be convinced with just anyone let alone marriage!!

However, some tweeps showed awareness that any suggested changes to advance women’s situation would not see the light unless they were decreed top-down from decision makers [103]. Hence, it was recommended that women be ready to take up their crucial role within the desired ‘transformed’ society.

**103.** #1F152 Any declaration to change or improve active laws will not see the light unless they came from decision-makers such as the consultative council, the ministers, or the royal court.

Related to the discourse of independence is the humanitarian discourse evident in arguments highlighting that women are eligible to be free since ‘freedom is not divided’ [104] and are as ‘competent human being[s]’ as men [105]. They call to break away from patriarchal ruling of women within and without their households so that they can own their choices and secure themselves. This discourse was legitimated in some tweets with religious discourse, in a way similar to those of discourses of male dominance and subordination of women. Since religion treats women as independent beings and holds them ‘by *shariah* law’ responsible for their actions, the need for a guardian is undermined [e.g. 106]. While several tweeps explicitly disagreed with forcing women to depend on guardians to carry out most legal dealings, these examples show the deployment of Arabic nominalisation and passivation to suggest desired changes from decision makers or mitigate criticism of current restrictions. More on their use as referential and predicational strategies as mitigation devices will be discussed under the strategies in Chapter 6.

**104.** #1F687 The topic should be looked into seriously and the woman [women] should be legally given eligibility certificate .. Freedom is not divided

**105.** #1M632 Will the [new] controls mean more complication or will they change because the woman is responsible for her own actions as a completely competent human being who has rights and duties.

**106.** #1F3 The woman is legally and by *shariah* law [will of God] is a fully-fledged human being who is responsible for herself before her God and her society and she does not need your guardianship, so enough with disregarding her

This is found in #2 as well. Women's independence was seen as the best alternative to marriage if it 'was not destined' [107].

**107.** #2M313 One of the reasons is high dowries and look there is nothing wrong with that who was not destined [to marry] God will give her the most important thing is her certificate and job because you cannot guarantee life.

The proposed changes by the news that triggered #1 were sometimes celebrated as a step towards independence. Progress is celebrated no matter how minimal it is towards giving Saudi women their 'dignity' back [108], lifting the 'siege' imposed on them in their own country [109]. Such expressions presuppose a negative stance against the imposition of the (new) travel controls and the status quo in general.

**108.** #1F530 Also this decision gives the Saudi woman back her dignity as an independent entity not dependent on anyone else but herself

**109.** #1F97 An alright step towards lifting the siege of the woman [women] in our society and God's willing it won't be long until the woman is given all her rights

The tweeps with a more progressive stance focus on the acquisition of degrees and jobs to help women to regain agency in matters related to their lives and assert their independence from enforced reliance on men/guardians. This was much reiterated in #2 to dismiss the significance of the label '*9anises*' [110] and to emphasise that a woman's education and job are her 'safety boat' at a time where most men 'lack prowess' [111]. These women, some contributors suggested, should not be considered in the percentage of *9anises* in SA because, like men, they retain the right to choose an unmarried life [112].

**110.** #2F180 The female is not in need of a man to complete her life she can achieve anything she wants without a man

**111.** #2M49 Finish your studies and get a good job and depend on yourself your career is your safety boat in a time when men lack prowess

**112.** #2M550 There is elective *9anis*-hood on the part of both genders by refusing marriage (voluntarily), these should be removed from the percentage of *9anis*-hood for it [the statistics] to be more precise and clear

The labelling of unmarried women as '*9anis*' was dismissed in many tweets in #2. In defence, staying single was said to be a 'better' choice because of a claimed unsuitability

of Saudi men for marriage, based on unhappy marriage examples surrounding some female tweeps [113 & 114]. This defensive attitude adopted by women leads us to understand that with the term ‘*9anis*’, older unmarried women are put at odds with a social order that traditionally defines them within the confines of the household while it privileges her (future) husband regardless of how dependable he is or the way he treats her.

113. #2F974 The right word is single and not *9anis* singlehood is not the end because so many single women are happy and successful and dignified and so many married women are miserable and humiliated what is important is contentment and good luck
114. #2F987 To be a *9anis* is better for me than to be a wife for an animal or a backward person 😊

Accordingly, marriage is no longer considered a priority in women’s lives, rather made a personal choice that needs careful assessment of the qualities of ‘a suitable partner’ [115]. In fact, the reported high-rate of unmarried women was considered a good sign that points to an increase in the number of independent women in SA [116], itself a reflection of a similar global trend and a desire for ‘greater freedom’ [117]. These arguments subvert the previously-mentioned traditional discourses that ‘marriage is the most important thing for women’ or that ‘men are the breadwinners of the home’, because it is not always the case.

115. #2F87 Rather minds have developed and recognised that marriage is a secondary thing that can add happiness and it can cause misery which should push women to take care of the qualities of a suitable partner
116. #2M856 This could also illustrate that the percentage of independent women is increasing which is a good sign 😊
117. #2M937 Women’s abstinence from marriage is a global phenomenon, resulting from women’s financial independence from the man, and her desire to live her life with greater freedom!

Thus, the problem of *9anis*-hood should be viewed as a social phenomenon not specific to the female gender or ‘Saudi women’, given that all people retain the right of choice to get married or stay single. The Gender-Equality Discourse supports a woman’s right to choose, like a man, whether to get married or not. Declarations of independence in the two hashtag threads include humanitarian discourses, prominent specially in #1 where the emphasis was on women's right for free mobility and travel, or at least for issuing and renewing their passports. A woman, some contributors argued, should retain

the right to travel whenever and wherever she wants once she is an adult [118], without being singled out for being female in comparison to women from around the world [119].

**118.** #1F61 If the girl's age is over 25 years, it is her right to travel without maHram or anyone else!!

**119.** #1M404 The majority of the world's women travel freely! What do our women miss? Unless that who opposes it knows that he is pestering his women (and his women wish to run away from him)

The most radical instances of declaring women's independence, besides calls to lift the guardianship law, consisted in #1 of calls for a feminist upheaval or revolution to free women from it [120]. Less drastic measures included suggesting creating a mass or organisation to address the King directly with women's issues [121] or a women's care unit to decide matters related to them [122]. These instances were rare, which shows the non-confrontational and non-oppositional nature of tweeps with progressive ideas.

**120.** #1F856 We need a feminist revolution that destroy those naiveties that restrict women and takes women's rights back from the hands of those because rights are taken not given

**121.** #1F852 There should be a feminist conglomerate that demands the lifting of oppression and directs its speech to the King personally because speaking with the other officials is a waste of time.

**122.** #1M683 It is shameful that decisions and planning of women's issues is in the hands of the man [men] why wouldn't a women's care unit be established to take care of women's matters like that of the male youth

Although the Gender-Equality Discourse was often summoned to promote change as seen above, it served to express a conservative position as well, but to a lesser degree. In response to the progressives, the discourse of independence was blamed in #2 for leading to working women's lack of interest in getting married. Those women who call for or seek freedom and independence within the hashtag thread were occasionally criticised for promoting the idea that marriage is not important for a woman to have a fulfilled life. Their claims were delegitimated drawing on a religious discourse attesting for its necessity [123]. They were accused of illogically considering the presence of a man in a woman's life as an 'addition' [124] or of making education and work a priority before marriage [125].

**123.** #2M680 Also, many girls think that they don't need marriage! Until the time of regret comes because marriage is a divine tradition and the Prophet's recommendation and we need it

**124.** #2M127 Notice the nagging of the category [of women] who make the man only an "addition" to the woman .. this is not the problem ..the problem is that they claim logic!!

125. #2M670 Every girl at the time of her puberty rejects and delays marriage until after her graduation then the masters then the PhD then she would accept even a quarter of a man, well she deserves the chosen *9anis*-hood

In the context of women's rights, very few links to the oft-discussed right to drive were drawn by conservative tweeps for the sake of opposition to any change in women's travel restrictions, associating women's rights with a liberalism that leads to social decay. This was done to trivialise the two women-related issues by comparison to men's field efforts to protect the country in the South where the war in Yemen continues [126]. Calls for women's rights were dismissed as 'the talk of intruders'. This was reinforced when their independent choice to travel, dress, drive, and select partners was associated with 'corruption' combined with a shared derogation of women with a common racial synecdochising slur 'the one with dark knees' [127].

126. #1M267 The men are being killed in the fields of honour to protect the country and your worry is whether the woman is travelling alone or driving the car the talk of intruders

127. #1M840 This is corruption itself and tomorrow she'll go out without *abaya* [the traditional black dress for women] then they'll drive a car and then she'll also propose [to a man] by herself without going back to *wali amr* [her custodian] the mother of a knee [a common slur for Saudi women pronouncing a common racial physical trait, namely dark knees] 😂😂😂

Along these lines and to further the derogation, male advocates of women's rights in #1 were suspected for being hypocrites, putting out a progressive stance to win other women than those in their families, whom they would never give 'an open consent to travel' [128]. Women achieving their rights was also associated with socially-unacceptable activities in the Saudi society, i.e. dating [129].

128. #1M100 Many of the men who reside here [in the hashtag] advocating for women's rights will not give his wife or sister an open consent to travel until the expiry date of the passport

129. #1M884 That means that the date is now outside Saudi [the country]

Glimpses of this type of association was also found in conservative discourses in #2 where resistance to the focus on the women driving issue was ascribed to the 'liberal' party, with the exaggeration 'liberals are killing us', in a topic that is not even relevant to it, i.e. marriage [130]. To 'eliminate' the problem of *9anis*-hood, one tweep mockingly suggested that women should be allowed to drive so that 'half of them' will be removed from the percentage of *9anis*-hood due to car 'accidents', another radical 'solution' [131].

130. #2M335 The liberals are killing us with the woman's [women's] car driving, leaving the real problems that the poor thing is suffering from!
131. #2M201 I expect the only solution for the elimination of 9anis-hood is the woman [women's] driving we'll get rid of half of them in accidents.

Some progressive tweeps responded to such an association in a similar way. They accused their conservative opponents of being 'racist' and incapable of accepting that people other than themselves have rights too [132]. Often referred to with the ambiguous pronouns 'they', 'their', or 'you' to mitigate accusations and derogations, conservatives were confronted for presuming that giving women their rights leads to corruption [133].

132. #1F397 As customary with racists they can't stand innovative systems like these, stop barking and understand the rights of other than yourselves if you know the word "rights"
133. #1F604 In their thinking if the woman [women] is liberated she will bring woes

This was supported with a rhetoric against shaming women with hurtful labels like that of '9anises'. Coming from educated women, the practice affirms the 'women-beware-women' discourse, traces of which were also found earlier under the discourse of the queen [134].

134. #2M840 We still use frustrating and hurtful labels with regards to the woman [women]. Unfortunately often these labels come from educated women

A Discourse of Equality consists of another type of discourses that celebrate women's successes and achievements nationally, or internationally, i.e. those on King Abdullah's study-abroad scholarship programme, through comparing them with the men's conduct abroad. Because of their 'perverted' behaviour, these men were derogated with metaphorical descriptions such as 'blackening our faces' [135]. By highlighting their functional roles in projecting a good image for the country, the restrictions on their travel and the need for *mahram*/consent were negatively described as an 'abandonment of an important part of the nation' [136] or negated because a woman like that 'does not need controls' restricting her travel [137].

135. #1F120 What we have benefited from sending girls abroad for scholarships is scientific success and amazing inventions and what we won from the young men is perversion and blackening our faces [brought us shame]!
136. #1F740 A citizen who serves her society and country needs a wali amr [guardian] or a court order! This abandonment of an important part of the nation and the tossing of its responsibility surprises me

**137.** #1M563 The Muslim woman does not need controls to travel as she is my mother, your sister and your wife and the nurse in hospitals and the teacher of the generations and she deserves our respect

Within the Gender-Equality Discourse in #1, there were other calls for travel restrictions to be imposed on Saudi men to express a progressive stance. Many contributors asked for equal travel controls to restrain men and contest the assumed essentialist privilege ascribed to them [138]. Others suggested that women should regain the right for free travel without any controls [139], or gender distinctions [140], because they are equal in rights and priorities [141].

**138.** #1F337 And where are the travel controls of the male or does the male have a feather over his head [is a privileged exception 🤔 May your luck fall [May you have bad luck]

**139.** #1M932 It is her right to travel like any other person as a [Saudi] citizen without any masculine controls

**140.** #1F312 There are supposed to be general controls for both genders..

**141.** #1M608 The woman is the same as the man who has rights and priorities

The Discourse of Equality in #2 revolved around the word ‘*9anis*’ and included (re)definitions of it as contributors engaged in sense-making processes. Tracing it back to its Arabic origin, the word signified a male who abstains from marriage because, unlike a woman, he is the one who initiates the marriage proposal [142]. Or, new meanings that express dissent were constructed by the mock-suggestion that the label should be given to women who get married to the wrong person instead [143]. Hence, some tweeps insisted on the neutrality of the word ‘*9anis*’ [144].

**142.** #2M956 By the way (the *9anis*) is a word that should not be used to call anyone but the man because the man is the one in whose hand the decision of marriage is so that if his single life is prolonged he is called a *9anis*

**143.** #2M268 The real *9anis* is the one who throws herself into the hands of a husband who does not fear God in [treating] her for the sake of a social viewpoint that is backward and lacking

**144.** #2M118 (*9anis*) is a neutral word in [Arabic] language, it is used for both genders but unfortunately our society (feminised) it and that was not enough, so it made its meaning (negative).!

A learned awareness was, thus, shown that the ‘masculine society’ has ‘gendered’ the word ‘*9anis*’ and added a negative prosody to it to subject women [145]. Based on those delegitimations, the statistics were often dismissed, and the term was redefined to encompass men and women at a certain age.

**145.** #2F902 The word ‘*9anis*’ is an adjective our masculine society has specified for “the girl” and rendered the man [as] “can’t be faulted” Measure

your life with how much you are happy not with when your marriage is

To conclude this section, the Gender-Equality discourse was a key emerging theme in deliberations of the two topics to accept or reject the prospect of SA transforming into an environment that is more inclusive of women. It includes the ‘small d’ discourses about women’s rights, independence, pride, and linguistic meta-commentary about the way women are talked about in society. Calls to move women’s citizenship status from secondary/subordinate/legal minor to equal will help them fulfil new expectations and roles as more work/study opportunities open up for them. Indeed, the fundamental values of equality and independence are constitutive categories of a new ideology in the making. Progressive representations of the self or the other aimed at reinforcing women’s humanity and agency and the online platform has enabled them to voice their resistance. It is worth mentioning that the very presence of these alternative discourses helps to shake up dominant conservative narratives, which can work to the advantage of women who are marginalised by the patriarchal discourses, yet, to the disadvantage of patriarchy as a system and its beneficiaries.

### **5.3 Other related discourses**

Based on Table 10 in Section 5.1, other peripheral themes with much less frequency, compared to the above central ones, were made relevant to the issues being debated, namely hashtag-related meta-discourses, religious discourses, and discourses constructing femininity and masculinity in SA.

#### **5.3.1 Meta-discourses**

A meta-discourse is any talk about the talk/topic being debated and the language used within it. Meta-discourses in the data point to the respective topical hashtags, their keywords (‘Saudi’, ‘women’, ‘control’, and ‘*9anis*’), their creators, other contributors within these hashtag threads, or the hashtagging practice itself. Notwithstanding the variation between the contributions of male and female tweeps to the two hashtag threads, Table 15 illustrates that the tendency to use this type of discourse among female contributors was much higher than male ones. It was invoked mainly to dismiss the general focus on Saudi women in hashtags or express feelings of shame at reading the comments in the threads in addition to rejecting the controls in #1 or assessing the keyword ‘*9anis*’ in #2. Yet, meta-discourses were also evident in any comment that



displayed awareness of the ‘gendered’ or ‘gendering’ aspects of discussions related to women, examples of which are dispersed in the analysis chapters, e.g. [145 above].

*Table 15: Summary of the invocations of meta-discourses*

<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#1 (travel)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>	<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#2 (9anis)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>
F (638)	144	<b>22.6%</b>	F (364)	83	<b>22.8%</b>
M (362)	59	16.3%	M (636)	94	14.8%
Total (1000)	173	17.3%	Total (1000)	177	17.7%

Twitter as a platform or any of its functions, e.g. ‘retweets’ or ‘hashtags’, were mentioned to disclose a conservative ideological position, as technological tools manipulated by a social group being criticised. Some contributors engaged in criticising women who participate in hashtags to lament their situation. For example, the self-proclaimed female tweep below aimed to misalign with this group of progressive women by daring them to leave the country: ‘show me how smart you are and have a safe trip!’. [146], also see example [69] under the anti-change ‘dismantling’ strategy aimed at derogating men who promote change or support women’s emancipation, Section 6.2.3.

**146. #1F314** I wish they let them travel without permission! So that each one who is nagging on Twitter [saying] she wants to run away! I tell her show me how smart you are and have a safe trip!

Likewise, girls who write against the present situation of marriage in #2 were attacked for distorting the image of the marital bond. This was attested for where conservatives associated liberals with the exploitation of Saudi women’s issues in hashtags. The repetition of hashtag-related keyword ‘the woman’ in [147], which is often employed as a metonym to stand for all women, highlights this association between a liberal ideology and the focus on, or singularisation of, Saudi women.

**147. #2M285** The #Liberal project starts with the woman and ends with the woman and passes by the woman and all of that with the purpose of derogating her dignity and for that reason #OneThirdOfSaudiWomenAre9anises [#2]

The more progressive tweeps were dismissive of #1, describing the debate in several tweets as funny [148]. Since the process of specifying ‘Saudi women’ with the ‘controls’ was considered demeaning or ‘derogatory’ [149], they expressed shame at reading the hashtag thread and suggested that the comments represent a dated mentality, a mentality from which they wish to exclude themselves [150]. As she requested the removal of the

hashtag because it will expose the Saudis to the mockery of the world , the last tweep was showing awareness of a wider public than the Saudis. She perceived the word ‘controls’ as a manifestation of the masculinised social order, linking to the previously-discussed discourse about SA as a masculine state.

- 148.** #1F433 I swear this hashtag causes laughter hahaha  
**149.** #1F59 Basically; the phrase #TravelControlsForSaudiWomen is derogatory for the woman [women]  
**150.** #1F484 Welcome to the masculine Arab Kingdom 😂 Remove the hashtag so that people do not see it and you say [as quoted from the original news of the controls] you are keeping up with the camel [substituting the original word in a parody to mean slow progress] I mean with this [fast developing] age 🇸🇦

Similarly, the keyword ‘*9anises*’ in #2 was designated as ‘impolite’ to women [151]. The hashtag was said to represent a social order negatively described as ‘the age of ignorance’ and its contributors as having ‘rusty minds’ [152].

- 151.** #2F836 There is impoliteness in the phrasing of the hashtag/ Shame on you I swear shame 🇸🇦  
**152.** #2F812 I felt that I am living in the age of ignorance with the comments of most in this hashtag! Rusty minds

Accordingly, some meta-discourses highlighted a view of these hashtag topics as both ‘gendered’ and ‘gendering’ specially because they emphasised issues pertaining to Saudi women as if these issues were the most important topics worth debating online, contributors complained. They showed awareness of this process of singularisation of ‘Saudi’ and ‘woman’ in hashtags as evident in the cynicism directed at the creator of #1 [153].

- 153.** #1F250 I’d like to know who is the brain who invented this topic,, and created it [the hashtag],, and why what is the purpose of it??!

To dismiss this focus on women, the creator of the hashtag was harshly criticised with the description of ‘semi-men like yourself’ and ‘his’ mentality is accused of being the reason why many women are *9anises* [154]. It may not be clear, at the outset, whether the dismissive stance expressed in the previous or the next tweets is conservative or progressive. However, resistance to change may be implicated in questioning the intentions of the creator of #1 as done in the previous tweet and in associating change and the focus on women with lack of manhood in the phrase ‘take care of dying your eyebrows’ in the following tweet.

**154. #2M954** Dear creator of the hashtag the Saudi women are 9anis because the number of semi-men like yourself have increased, so take care of dying your eyebrows and stop lying

The general exploitation of ‘Saudi’ women’s issues and the differentiation of Saudi women were further critiqued in meta-discourses about #2. This was done by comparison to how surveying the numbers of unmarried men is overlooked [155]. Such differentiation was interpreted as a reflection of the masculine-led culture that locates women within the domestic sphere and is accustomed to monitoring her actions [156].

**155. #2F74** There is focus on single women in the statistics and the number of single men is not mentioned, because the masculine culture reduces the value of women with marriage only.

**156. #2F981** Ok what about the 9anis men how many are they since the percentage of males in the Kingdom is higher than the female ones or are you good at counting the woman’s age and her steps

Meta-discourses were also employed to reveal the tweep’s stance and positionality regarding the issues at hand in relation to other contributors within the threads. Negative comments devaluating the new controls in #1 were criticised to show a progressive stance by misalignment [157].

**157. #1F184** Some commentators on the hashtag or in a more general way that this topic the majority are negative with his opinion although it is a good start to be opened by official personnel.

The same applies to #2 where the clash between male and female contributors merited grouping them into the new generations of ‘semi-men’ and ‘tomboys’ to ridicule them [158] or into extremists and ‘open-minded people’ to scorn the continuous ‘war’ between the two ideological poles in the country [159]. Within these tweets, the contributors drew on interdiscursivity with the discourses of gender identity and religion, respectively. From the existence of other hashtags about Saudi women, as presupposed in phrases like ‘as usual’, it may be concluded that hashtags create spaces for ideological conflicts to be verbally deliberated in SA.

**158. #1F808** A hashtag that contains Saudi tomboys and semi-men 😂😂

**159. #1M788** As usual in the hash nothing is new a war between extremists and open-minded people hahahahaha

Based on what has been shown so far, such hashtag-related meta-discourses have been drawn upon as interdiscursive resources for tweeps to reveal their ideological stance towards the issues at hand.

### 5.3.2 Religious discourses

A religious discourse is generally constituted by either a religious ‘content’ or a religious ‘context’ (Finnern, 2014). Religious content may be an invocation of a deity, a representation of a character as religious or non-religious, or a direct or indirect reference to religious texts, beliefs, rituals, places of worship, or narratives. Religious context is conveyed in communication through a sender and/or a receiver with a religious background, whether as believers or sceptics, and a religious message (ibid). It is possible that a discourse is considered religious even if it has no religious content because of its religious context. Both aspects of religious discourse are applicable in the subject matter at hand. In this section, references to Allah (God), the Prophet, his wives or followers, Islam/religion, the two canonical sources, i.e. Qur’an and Sunnah/Hadith (Prophet Mohammad’s teachings), quotations and terms derived from either, and references to religious (or legislative) scholars were coded in the data as religious discourse. Before moving on to explicating the nuances of this type of discourse, some of the factors that affect how it is framed are worth discussing.

Religious discourse relates to the interpretations upon which the current situation of Saudi women is justified and how the patriarchal as well as the progressive ideologies are put forward. Social practices in SA are influenced by a strict monolithic interpretation of the canonical texts as established in Section 2.1. The data is rife with various authoritarian texts and interpretations of them thereof with or against institutionalising a guardianship rule that has deprived women of their right to choose to travel or wed. Progressive and conservative discourses alike used religious quotations or terminology to affirm their position on the issue.

The proportional frequencies on Table 16 and Table 17 below reveal that religious discourse and quotations were more frequently invoked by male users in both hashtag threads. Religious discourse was drawn upon in #1 to support positioning on the matter of women’s travel, either in defence of the guardianship control or in resistance to it. In #2, it was deployed for the delegitimation of high dowries or the guardian’s difficult demands, or the legitimization of polygamy, as will be further demonstrated in Chapter 7.

*Table 16: Summary of the use of religious discourse*

<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#1 (travel)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>	<b>Total number of F/M tweets</b>	<b>#2 (9anis)</b>	<b>Proportional frequency</b>
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F (638)	67	10.5%	F (364)	30	8.2%
M (362)	66	<b>18.2%</b>	M (636)	97	<b>15.3%</b>
Total (1000)	133	13.3%	Total (1000)	127	12.74%

*Table 17: Summary of the use of quotations*

Total number of F/M tweets	#1 (travel)	Proportional frequency	Total number of F/M tweets	#2 ( <i>9anis</i> )	Proportional frequency
F (638)	19	3%	F (364)	7	2%
M (362)	17	<b>4.6%</b>	M (636)	22	<b>3.5%</b>
Total (1000)	36	3.6%	Total (1000)	29	2.9%

The comparable numbers of traces of religious discourse among the female contributors to the two threads, which is not always quoting, could be explained by the mentions of God for various functions such as supplicating, swearing, or taking oaths by invoking Divine witness to assert their arguments. This is not surprising for two reasons: a) the way the Saudis have been socialised makes the use of religious discourses a part and parcel of their identity, and b) because mainstream religious interpretations have come under scrutiny during the transformation that the country is undergoing, and the newly-adopted progressive ideas needed to reform the situation of women.

The tendency to use religious texts to justify a patriarchal position is reflected in conservative discourses. From #1, there were direct quotations from religious texts, i.e. marked quotations from the *Hadith* to assert the importance of a *maHram* for a woman [e.g. 160], or unmarked quotations from the *Qur'an* to express devotion to faith and rejections of the ‘inventions’ of man [e.g. 161].

**160.** #1M490 Whoever said: (A woman should not travel for a distance of one day and one night without a *maHram*) is the Prophet of God who created the woman and knows what makes her best and is best for her.

**161.** #1F336 *Halal* [what is permitted] is clear and *Haram* [what is prohibited] is clear we are contented with what my God has set out but things you invent from your heads to claim to protect God’s creatures that is perplexing.

From #2, The same pattern existed in such traditional discourses where quotations were clearly set off from the remaining of the comment to encourage guardians to minimise their requests and accept husbands characterised by ‘religion and moral conduct’ for their daughters [162]. In other cases, quotations were reported and rephrased. For instance, in [163] a male tweep recommended the elimination of *9anis*-hood, perhaps

through accepting polygamy, because ‘the Prophet’ has mentioned that, based on his understanding, women are ‘an accessory of life’ that should be enjoyed.

**162.** #2F438 The Prophet peace be upon him said: (if a man whose religion and moral conduct are pleasing to you proposes to you, then let him marry; otherwise there will be great mischief and corruption on earth)

**163.** #2M620 Fight against *9anis*-hood and enjoy women because they are an accessory of life and its beauty and the Prophet, peace be upon him, has mentioned women as among the things that he loved from our life on earth.

Religious interpretations concerning the necessity of a *maHram* and not his consent in #1 were deliberated in progressive discourses to reveal contradictions in the conservative party’s discourse and point out that the issue is more a cultural manifestation of men’s thirst for control than it is religious [164]. With a plea for people to research and understand their religion, a direct quotation of a Prophetic saying which predicts a time when women can travel without need for protection was cited for the purpose of legitimating women’s wish for the travel consent rule to be lifted [165].

**164.** #1F117 The travel consent system is not a religious matter if it were religious it would have been applied to all travel! And (the presence of a *maHram*) with a woman would have been a condition not (his consent)

**165.** #1F787 Look for this *Hadith* which told about a time that will come when “the female traveller may be able to travel from Makkah to San’aa [in Yemen] not fearing anything but Allah and the wolf on her cattle”

Conservative discourses in #2 were disrupted to a lesser frequency by status-quo critics. Quoting religious texts, compassion is shown to ‘*9anises*’ by derogating men [166]. The fact that this verse and other religious quotations were not delimited with quotation marks may be explained by their currency within the context they were mentioned in.

**166.** #2F99 It’s good God’s willing may be my God protected from a one-third [of men] who do not pray or deviant or drug user or ... and it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you [unmarked excerpt from a Qur’anic verse 2:216]

Thus, Qur’anic verses were sometimes recontextualised to express dissent, allowing women to lament the suffering that the status quo is causing them by asking to be removed from this country [167] or for patience from the Divine [168]. Such recontextualisation ascribed new meanings to both the respective verses and intensified the situation of women.

**167.** #1F171 "Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors" [Qur’anic verse 4:75]

168. #1F52 Never mind we are pleased with a little of hope O' our Sustainer!

Shower us with patience in adversity [Qur'anic verse 2:250] 🙄🙄 ..

Without the use of religious quotations, a similar pattern was found in #2 where contributors on the conservative side of the spectrum invoked the name of God to pray for unmarried men and women to find each other [169] or to urge single women in particular to be patient and hold on to hope [170]. Such rhetoric represents marriage as very important to women and passivates them by depriving them of agency and choice.

169. #2M114 Generally we ask Allah to give every single man and woman the good pious (spouse) and to bring them together to do good and may

He give them good offspring.. ❤️

170. #2F204 May Allah protect and guide them to all that is good ..Ask more for forgiveness and wait because life was not created overnight and the consequences of patience are always good

Tweeps with a more progressive stance showed awareness that it is male interpretations of religious texts that cause the present marginalisation of women and gender inequity in the Saudi context. By juxtaposing travel conditions in the past and in the present, one tweep questioned the requirement of a *maHram* which contradicts the purpose of religion to facilitate people's lives [171]. Another tweep criticised the adopted masculine control that distrusts women and invited decision makers to go back to the basics of the faith [172].

171. #1F466 In the past travelling was on camels and it was difficult, but now travelling is on planes and safety is provided I don't see a reason to forbid it! –religion facilitates life and not makes it difficult/distressful

172. #1F984 Our lives are all about controls whoever sees us would think we are immoral and living differently from other people I wish you go back to the basics of our true religion because it is life

Some contributors to #2 were relying on religious discourse to present counter arguments that discredit the importance of *9anis*-hood as well because it has no religious value [173] and blame men for its current rate because they 'enslave their wives in the name of religion' [174].

173. #2F825 This term literally does not exist in the Qur'an or the Sunnah [the Prophet's sayings] which means it is something we do not take seriously :)

174. #2M957 Men are finished, what is left are males who enslave their wives in the name of religion.. 9anis and free or [is better than] an enslaved wife...

The controls were said to be a result of a governmental consolidation of gendered stereotypes to gratify traditions, habits, and 'deformed' religious interpretations [175]. Thus, tweeps were aware that religious discourse has been manipulated by scholars and

their supporters to draw culture-based definitions that depict women as unworthy of trust [176]. Discourses about religion, tradition, culture, history, modernity, and ideology intersect here.

**175.** #1M804 The shackles of the modern age are no longer made of iron or handcuffs. Rather, they are traditions of the ancient time embraced by mental ideologies taking up a deformed religious character.

**176.** #1F301 Since the beginning of the generation of slumber [an inversion of ‘awakening’ for derogation] and the outlook at the woman is that she is not worthy of trust in the age of ignorance she used to be buried and now she is buried in a different way while alive

Clearly progressive discourses that challenged the status quo also challenged the traditional ‘masculinised’ interpretations of authoritarian texts and, hence, varying interpretations of ‘religious discourse’ emerged to be dialogued. Individuals went further to express their stance toward a religious tradition or any of its values/figures, elaborate, and discuss interpretive/hermeneutic discrepancies they encountered within each. Some tweeps reminded their readers that Islam came to overhaul the unfavourable circumstances of women in pre-Islamic Arabia because the Qur’anic position is that males and females are equal from conception [177] and that they retain the same freedom of choice and accountability before God [178]. The ultimate position of the word of God is to do universal justice, that is to provide protection and independence to women.

**177.** #1F413 In Islam the woman is responsible for herself, free with her money and is required to pledge allegiance [to a leader] and she is punished or awarded according to *Shariah* law like a man so how can he be her custodian

**178.** #1M328 A human being is born free and he is free to choose whatever he wants and go wherever he wants so that he can achieve God’s mission on earth, whether male or female.

As a result, many contributors ascribed the current social problems to excessiveness and extremism in the cultural adaptations of religion [179]. Religion was repetitively claimed a cover for the hegemonic practices exercised on women.

**179.** #1F42 They lie by the name of religion and commit fraud by the name of religion and religion and our lenient *shariah* disowns them “the denomination of excessiveness is one” [relevant to religious doctrines but is not a religious quotation]

Government-supported religious authority featured in the data in mentions of ‘محكمة’ or ‘محاكم’ (court(s)), ‘قاضي’ (judge), ‘شيخ’ (Sheikh) or ‘الهيئة’ (religious police). The ‘مطوع’ or ‘مطوعة’ (*muttawa*(s), i.e. religious people) constitute the people who usually fill positions related to court in addition to volunteering conservatives who believe it is their religious and social duty to call for virtue and combat vice. They are identified by the



special physical attributes of long beards and short *thobes* (the traditional white dress for Saudi men). Most references to these figures were employed by progressive discourses in #1 because of the nature of the topic to delegitimize the newly-suggested controls and express privacy concerns. Having a woman's travel decision under the mercy of a stranger *muttawa* was considered unacceptable by many [e.g. 180]. Those people who support these rules and focus on women were referred to with variations of the term '*muttawa*' such as 'مستطوعين' /*mustaTwi9iyn*/, 'أبو طويعة' /*abuw Tuwaiy9ah*/, and 'متطاوعين' /*mutaTawi9iyn*/, which implicates the negative connotations that have been attached to them.

**180.** #1M638 At least before it was just a guardian, her father or brother are from the family, but now she is under the mercy of a *muttawa*

References to these religious authorities were less frequent in #2, except where legitimation for polygamy was sensed by aware contributors. They were also referred to as hypocrites ('مستشرفين' /*mustašrifin*/), which depicts those conservatives as pretentious people hiding under a mask of religion while they enjoy watching men and women exchange blame for the phenomenon, as indexed with the 'beer emoji' [181].

**181.** #2M394 The married men think polygamy as the solution while the girls think that the problem is with the men and vice versa and the *mustashrifin* [hypocrites] and the 'conservative group' have accusations and a point of view 🍷

The intentions of the hashtag's creator and its contributors were questioned and associated with the religious police who were assumed to manipulate the hashtag to convince women of accepting polygamous marriages [182]. People were asked not to fall in to what the '*muttawas*' want, i.e. polygamy, while suggesting that it would only complicate matters in society [183].

**182.** #2M3 The smell of the religious police members is fragrant in the hashtag to justify what they seek [i.e. polygamous marriages] ..

**183.** #2M104 The solution is birth control and tackling the issues of unemployment and residence and putting a reasonable limit to dowries polygamy will complicate the problem do not believe *muttawas* [another pretentious form of *muttawas*]

Overall, religious discourse surfaced where comments contained doctrine, justifications, or (de)legitimations, sometimes deriving evidence from canonical texts and the shared linguistic repertoire of religious terminologies to express stance. Further examples of its deployment for these purposes will be presented under some of the discursive strategies in Chapter 6.

### 5.3.3 Discourses about gender identity in SA

Several discourses discussing gender identity and roles were noticeable in the two debates. These discourses include the ‘battle-of-the-sexes’ discourse, and essentialist discourses defining the social roles of men and women based on biological sex alone, privileging the former and discriminating against or domesticating the latter, in addition to fixed depictions of their gender identity, ‘male sexual drive’, and a rejection of homosexuality. As Table 18 below illustrates, a higher frequency of its occurrence in #1 was found amongst female contributors, which could be explained by the recurrent criticism of Saudi men’s activities abroad or the unrestricted travel of younger men as points of comparison to women, mainly to undermine the privileging of males and the travel controls for women. Other than that, its invocation by male contributors to both hashtag threads approximately resembled those by female contributors to #2.

*Table 18: Summary of the use of discourse of gender identity*

Total number of F/M tweets	#1 (travel)	Proportional frequency	Total number of F/M tweets	#2 ( <i>9anis</i> )	Proportional frequency
F (638)	62	9.7%	F (364)	17	4.7%
M (362)	18	5%	M (636)	34	5.3%
Total (1000)	80	8%	Total (1000)	51	5.1%

The ‘battle-of-the-sexes’ discourse was recognisable mainly in progressive discourses to expose a patriarchal ‘fear’ of women ‘winning’. Along a meta-discourse, the topic in #1 was sarcastically suggested as a site where the ‘male’ conservatives and liberals agree because they are ‘afraid’, ‘خايفين’ /xa:iyfiyn/, of women’s liberation from their control [184]. Fear is invoked as ‘uncertainty’ elsewhere with the word ‘التوجس’ /altawajjus/ to describe how the masculine society fears women’s liberation [185].

**184.** #1F995 This is the hashtag on which the Saudi *muttawas* and liberals agree .. all of them are against the woman [women] travelling without them because they are afraid she cheats on them if she travels alone

**185.** #1F190 This decisions and similar laws and legislations make me wonder why is there this enormous uncertainty about letting the woman [women] live?

Progressive tweeps emphasised conflict to intensify this masculine fear based on the idea that the gain of women means the loss of men. On the one hand, men fear losing that ego-feeding hierarchical position in the lives of their women [186]. On the other hand,

women fear to challenge those custodians whom they must live with and depend on, c.f. example [47] earlier in discussions of the discourse about guardianship leading to ‘confrontation between women and their *maHrams*’.

**186.** #1F381 You can’t take that your female will one day not need you out of fear that she will stop begging you which satisfies your ego that’s why you stand against her rights

In #2, the same fear was suggested by progressives with a word like ‘يخيف’ /yuxiyf/ (scares) to describe how a male-dominated social structure dreads women’s independence [187]. The existence of a ‘battle-of-the-sexes’ discourse was further implicated in criticism of the oppositional verbal exchanges between men and women within the hashtag [188].

**187.** #2F829 Women’s independence with their lives scares the masculine society

**188.** #2F62 The Saudi man is saying [they are *9anises*] because they are ugly and the Saudi woman answers with you’re not handsome either, but you only have each other so relax.

Conservatives too alluded to this ‘battle of the sexes’ in their rhetoric proposing *9anis*-hood as a ‘natural consequence’ of empowering women as though they are taking over the jobs of men [189].

**189.** #2M586 A natural consequence of employing women at the expense of men’s employment ... The employment of the man results in a family... whereas the employment of the woman results in a *9anis* woman and an unemployed man

*9anis*-hood was naturalised as a ‘natural consequence’ drawing on a metaphor of war, overtly representing a cultural understanding of marriage as ‘a war of self-assertion’ between men and women [190].

**190.** #2M725 Very normal if they enter marriage as if it were a war of self-assertion between males and females.

As traditional definitions and expectations of maleness and femaleness were deliberated in the hashtag samples at hand, which can already be read off previous examples expressing either stance, another progressive stance was expressed in #1 against the need for control by attributing it to a trust crisis as guardians do not believe women are able to control or protect themselves [191], and a ‘fear of women’, masked as concern for their safety [192].


**191.** #1M208 All of this because of what?? Is it because their lack of confidence in their daughters??

**192.** #1M637 They prevent her from free mobility with the excuse of fear for her while in reality they fear her.

Akin to discourse of the battle-of-the-sexes is how sexuality is depicted in discourse. The themes that men are privileged, and women are discriminated against based on essentialist understanding of gender are central Discourses which were elaborated under Section 5.2. They were often explicitly brought into the discussions by many pro-change contributors for subversion. The essentialist gendering and gendered discrimination was questioned while implicitly referencing the male organ through ellipsis for mitigation [193].

**193.** #1F130 The Saudi woman is enslaved by the male with the .... Why?

Criticism of the patriarchal hierarchy was intensified by mock-suggesting that somebody should invent a hymen (the virginity membrane) that can stay intact [194] because it is the root cause of women's metaphorical imprisonment in SA. The need to protect women's honour, explicitly articulated as 'hymen', is said to be executed by the government through imposing controls [195]. Because of this and as a sign of decline in comparison to progress in other countries, namely America, the new controls were negatively evaluated by associating them with the purpose of protecting women's 'private part' [196]. This kind of rhetoric gives evidence to a prominent discourse about Saudi women as symbols of the religious values upheld by the country.

**194.** #1F50 We want someone to do us a favour and invent a hymen for the Saudis that does not tear because the girls here are prisoners because of it 

**195.** #1F619 Why isn't there controls for the Saudi man [men]? They are more dangerous to other countries or is the government concerned with protecting our hymens?

**196.** #1M44 America spent 50 years to build the civilisation of its people and unite them whereas Saudi [the country] spent 1450 years to establish controls and obstacles to protect a woman's private part

Male privileging was criticised in #2 by commonly drawing a parallel distinction between a 'male' and a 'man' or 'manhood'. Nowadays, girls do not wish to be with mere 'males' [197] and this is lamented as the reason why there are many *9anises* [198].

**197.** #2M393 Some of our male youth lack manhood and this is what the girl doesn't want

**198.** #2F176 [as an explanation for 9anis-hood] The shortage in men unfortunately not every male can be said to be a man in addition to the incapacitating terms he wants in the girl high dowries is just an excuse

The dominant conservative discourse of femaleness defines it as naturally passive or receptive of 'legitimate' male offerings and stereotypes them as 'irrational', 'lacking', or

‘domestic’, as exemplified earlier under Section 5.2.1.3. Portraying women as incapable of controlling their emotions brings fear into the picture. For those reasons, conservatives depicted women as a target for liberalist agendas, intensified by drawing on the metaphor of ‘reigns being loosened’ [199].

**199.** #1M666 The reins are starting to loosen up so that the mare bolts out to the freedom that they [liberals] are seeking

Once they step outside their homes, they are often represented as ‘*fitnah*’ and a source of ‘threat’ to their own honour or of ‘shame’ for their families’ and this was subverted in progressive discourses in #1 by magnifying ‘scandalous’ cases of men’s behaviour abroad [200].

**200.** #1F438 If all they fear is that the woman would lose her chastity! Let them see what came out of the travel of some young men other than rape and the loss of honour and morals

For the same progressive position, , men and women were juxtaposed in #1 against each other in one tweet to expose the gendered roles defined for them, placing men in the public sphere and women in the domestic sphere, while representing it in explicit sexual terms [201].

**201.** #1M45 Yes a man has the right to lay down and stretch and eat and go out and travel.. and a woman has the right to raise [children] and cook and clean and sometimes be ridden like animals

Equivalent patterns were found in #2 where marriage was viewed as the only option for women to stay chaste as though its sole purpose of marriage is sex. In conservative discourses, polygamy was often offered as a solution to this problem encouraging men, including married men, to act towards eliminating *9anis*-hood [202]. This depicts women as in need for men, deriving their value in life from their marital status, see also example [96] above.

**202.** #2M246 Brother let them marry single men and whoever wants polygamy and *9anis*-hood will be gone what is wrong if the girl marries a married man isn’t it more protective of her chastity and I am one of them

Conservative male contributors expressed a negative stance towards this notion that the purpose of marriage [203] or polygamy [204] is merely a desire for sex while venting their frustration with the cultural impositions on them for marriage.

**203.** #2M887 The reason is “the pride” of the society’s culture she gets married today and tomorrow she goes to visit her family and criticise his going out with friends as if marriage is meant for intimate times !!

**204.** #2M668 Most teenagers [girls] on Twitter think that polygamy is intended for sex, yes, its purpose is sex and reproduction and the making of a good

family, what will happen when a girl is corrupted doesn't she get sexually corrupted

While code-mixing Arabic and English, one self-proclaimed male tweep highlighted that the increase of the number of older unmarried women in #2, which he described as sexually attractive or 'MILFs' (capitalisation in original clearly for emphasis), was a good thing, the 'bright side' of the phenomenon [205]. By using English, he demonstrated exposure to foreign cultures and appeared to be excluding most Saudi hashtag readers because of his language choice, missing the fact that originally a 'milf' typically has children as well<sup>4</sup>. The issue of *9anis*-hood seems to be played down and at the same time a liberalist sexualisation of women was embraced to project a westernised mentality, hence exposing a shared social ideology that associates Western culture with a sexualised instrumentalisation of women. Such an instance of individual discursive creativity creates a hybrid social image for women that lends them agency (to be milfs) and contests conventional perceptions of women and masculine attitudes depicting them as 'chaste' or as mere 'possessions' that need to be protected (Jones, 2010).

**205** #2M172 1/3 of Saudi females are eligible to be MILFs #الوجه\_المشرق# 1/3 of Saudi females are eligible to be MILFs #theBrightSide

Furthermore, 'male sexual-drive' and/or 'boys-will-be-boys' discourses constitute other resources drawn upon to keep women concealed in the private sphere or justify the need to control them. In conservative discourses in #1, a common metaphor to caution women of men's primitive nature is that of 'men are wolves' [206]. Some male tweeps have internalised this stereotype that they did not hesitate to confirm that tendency by direct expressions of interest and flirtation, which will be further discussed under Section 6.2.1.2. They attempted to legitimate their sexual adventures abroad based on difficult marriage conditions imposed by the women and their guardians while presupposing ill-intent on the part of women for travelling abroad [207].

**206.** #1M759 That she does not travel .. Sister ..the human wolves are trying to ambush you

**207.** #1M747 The man travels abroad because of the intolerance of the woman when it comes to the dowry and the issue of marriage so he is excused but what is the excuse of the girl to travel abroad

For the same purpose, many men utilised #2 to express interest in women by posting marriage ads as 'special offers' [208], thus objectifying and commodifying women by

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<sup>4</sup> MILF (n.). (July, 2018). *Oxford English Dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/273349?redirectedFrom=milf>

indexing a discourse of consumerism. There was an equalising but negative evaluation of some young men and women that projected them as corrupt and unsuitable for marriage because of their involvement in illicit relations outside marriage [209]. A perception of change in the Saudi society is associated here with immorality.

**208.** #2M711 Special offer I want a wife who is religious and beautiful let's get married and eliminate Zanah and pleasure ourselves and them

**209.** #2M19 Corruption which is expanding until it became possible for the young man or the girl to establish forbidden [sexual] relations to channel their sexual energy

This discourse was held by progressives in #1 against traditional men to justify their fear of women's freedom based on fears that they would abuse the freedom to travel in a way that resembled the way many men presumably did [210].

**210.** #1F889 I have a contention that the man who prevents the woman from travelling is afraid she would do what he did in his first trip or that she tries what he tried

This discourse of male-sexual drive was emphasised by progressive tweeps in #1 to delegitimise singling women out with travel controls. There were numerous descriptions of how males' misconduct abroad was overlooked when deciding who travels without any supervision or limitation. Such singularisation was evaluated as a 'majestic contradiction' underscoring essentialist ideas about males' lack of control over their sexual desires, leading to problems abroad [211]. This was combined with an aversion to the traditional depictions of women as emotional being with no control over their desires, affirming the opposite and lending them more power [212]. Based on that argument, some tweeps considered imposing travel controls for Saudi men a priority [213].

**211.** #1M812 Those from whom problems come usually outside the Kingdom are "men" and they have no travel controls. Those from whom no problems come have them #MajesticContradictions

**212.** #1F618 The woman does not need control like the male simply because she can control herself and her will is strong control is for the males because they are bringing us shame everywhere

**213.** #1F240 At the same time boys aged between 19-22 in the hotels and bars of Dubai committing fornication :) don't they need controls ?

Such an equalising proposal to institutionalise travel controls for men to delegitimize those for women was pervasive. Male travellers seeking expression of their sexuality abroad were allied with 'hypocrite' members of the religious clan, the *muttawas*, whose sexual inclinations were expressed domestically through preaching for polygamy and the concealment of women [214]. They were considered partners or 'more corrupt' than the another, because they share 'maleness'. Their masculinised ideology, which privileges

males with liberties not granted for women, was described as a ‘perverted’ understanding of religion [215]. Notice how the argument for maleness and male’s need for control was presented in the previous tweets in association with negative evaluations such as ‘problems’, ‘shame’, ‘drinking’, ‘perversion’, ‘hypocrisy’, and ‘[sexually-transmitted] diseases’.

214. #1F209 You should be putting rules for your drunk immoral males in Bahrain and Morocco and Lebanon 🇧🇪 but the *mustatwas* (pretentious form of *muttawas*) are more corrupt than the immoral males 😂
215. #1F789 First should be the controls over males that who goes every holiday and brings disease [STD] from the [intimate] relations which his perverted religious ideology permits for him 🙄

This male-sexual drive discourse was further affirmed in #2 to delegitimize the financial demands imposed on Saudi men in marriage and legitimate promiscuity. To absolve men of the blame for the *9anis*-hood of women, the experience of young Saudi men was emphasised through comparing the marriage conditions imposed on them with the sexual liberty and simplicity of marriage conditions enjoyed by men from other nationalities [216]. It was also used to legitimate marital adultery based on claims of a wife’s lack of beauty with no makeup on [217].

216. #2M218 *9anises* don’t blame depraved men, the young man is a young man whether he is American or Saudi the only difference is that the first lived and settled down, while the second did not live and so does not want to settle down
217. #2M932 Certainly they will be *9anises* the young man has nothing to do with fake expenses reaching 250 thousand for one [girl] who would look like his brother if she takes off her makeup ..so he will go to *Haraam* [illicit sexual relationships]

Lastly, there were several instances in either hashtag that referred to a growing homosexuality in the Saudi society. The lack of travel controls for young Saudi men in #1 was considered a contradiction compared to the singularised imposition of travel controls on women [218]. It was criticised through the mention of one, a young man claimed to be a homosexual nominated to represent his type of people.

218. #1F278 The homosexual F\*\*\*\*\* [masked for anonymity] deserves these controls me and other girls will not travel to look for boys or drinks but it is an oppressive stupid society

Similar invocations of this discourse were found in #2 to explain *9anis*-hood with the argument that, based on the way they dress in public, younger generations are becoming



transgenders and homosexuals [219]. Such was expressed bluntly as ‘gays’ [220] or its definition was combined with laughter to mitigate the ‘taboo’ discussion [221].

219. #2M210 You nag about high dowries I wish that whoever conducted the statistics will walk through the malls on the weekends and see the appearance of the young men of 2015 to understand the real reason 😊  
🔴
220. #2F34 Because there are gays
221. #2F32 Because the boy himself wants to marry a boy khkhkhkhkhkhkh that’s it stop the denial

Overall, as discourses about gender identity were embedded within the discussions at hand, those of marriage and those stereotyping or domesticating women. With them also emerged the ‘battle-of-the-sexes’ and the ‘male-sexual drive’ discourses and the denunciation of homosexuality based on the taken-as-commonsense discourse of male heterosexuality.

#### 5.4 Platform-specific affordances as interdiscursive resources

Twitter’s interface invites its users to manipulate language to overcome its 140-character constraint by providing various affordances to enable them to express their views (Evans, 2016). Among these affordances, mentions and hashtags constitute hyperlinked resources that help create interdiscursive links with other topics, places, entities, or people. In the present 2000 sampled tweets, mentions, nonetheless, were rarely used. Embedded only 3 times in #1 and 5 times in #2, they were added primarily to punctuate the end of a tweet, to promote a celebrity, or invite someone to join the conversation.

In two occasions, however, they appeared to have more significance for the arguments and the more conservative positioning presented in the tweets. One male tweep hailed a famous religious figure (@MohamadAlarefe) for support in countering calls for allowing women to travel without consent in #1, because he was ‘afraid’ to be judged a ‘hypocrite’ [222].

222. #1M86 I’m afraid to comment and they will call me a *mustashrifeen* [intrusive hypocrites] ye sheikh @MohamadAlarefe

Another tweep added the two mentions @ShuraCouncil\_SA @KingSalman to address the king and his consultative council and formally request financial measures to be established to encourage polygamy, presumed the solution for the problem of *9anis-*hood in #2 (see example [22] above). Such is a case of addressivity that indicts powerful figures into the conversation with a legitimatory function. At the outset, this user may

appear to call for change by requesting this support, but it is a change that perpetuates the subordination and domestication of women and one that serves the interests of the ‘conservative’ male population, i.e. polygamy.

In comparison, the use of hashtags was prominent, starting with the main hashtags under study. Based on what was reviewed in Section 3.2.4.3, hashtags are of two main types: ‘Tags’ with topical functions and evaluative ‘Commentary’ ones (Shapp, 2014). It may be argued, thus, that the studied ‘topical’ hashtags (Page, 2012a; Zappavigna, 2011) correspond to the ‘Tag’ category. This is especially the case since they fulfil the two basic tagging functions of aggregating relevant tweets through searchable tags and connecting to a community of users interested in the issues of Saudi women (Shapp, 2014). They represent the take-out summary phrases of the two announcements that spurred the respective hashtag debates.

Based on Zappavigna’s (2015) meta-discursive functions of hashtags, the two hashtag keywords fulfil experiential, textual, and interpersonal meta-functions. In terms of the experiential meta-function, it is apparent that #1 has the grammatical structure of a topic/title constituting a post-qualified noun phrase describing plans of a governmental entity. In contrast, #2 consists of a declarative sentence fulfilling the speech act of ‘statement’ summarising the news it was launched as a reaction to. Textually, they are topic-marking the content of the tweets and thus function as ‘Theme’ to use Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004) terms. In terms of meaning, they are neither too general nor too narrow to render them unused or idiosyncratic in a way that would make it unlikely for Saudi users to search for them. From an interpersonal perspective, the two topics are culture- or country-specific and the issues emphasised concern a specific social group within it, i.e. ‘Saudi’ women, but the views expressed have their implications in terms of social relations. As delineated by the word ‘Saudi’ in both hashtags, users who participated in these debates are aligning to ‘an ambient community’ that is mainly Saudi or interested in matters related to Saudi women.

There is an evaluative aspect in the keywords of both hashtags. The word ‘controls’ in #1 is semantically loaded with such questions as what motivates the use of the word ‘controls’ for women, why they are specified to Saudi women alone, and how the new controls are different from the ones before the news was announced. The wording of #2 seems immediately evaluative since it quotes a statement of a vague, statistically

unsupported, percentage singling Saudi women out to use the stigmatising word ‘spinsters’.

Even though they consume ‘expensive’ space in a tweet, other hashtags appeared in conjunction with the two main hashtags in the two datasets. Table 19 below quantitatively summarises the proportional frequency and distribution of other hashtags in both datasets and sub-datasets. It shows that other hashtags were added similarly to the two hashtag samples, but that male tweeps embedded more than one ‘other’ hashtag in addition to the main one into their tweets more than female users did. There were 31 other hashtags in 27 contributions by female tweeps but 23 of them in 18 tweets by male tweeps in #1. While there were only 7 other hashtags in 7 female contributions, there were 50 in 40 male contributions in #2. This suggests that females may not be as inclined to reach out for a wider audience as male contributors appear to be. Such differences may not be significant, however, and further research may help illuminate this tendency and its motivations.

*Table 19: The frequency of other hashtags*

Category	#1 (30 varieties)			#2 (32 varieties)		
	<b>M</b> (/362)	<b>F</b> (/638)	<b>Total</b> (/1000)	<b>M</b> (/636)	<b>F</b> (/364)	<b>Total</b> (/1000)
No. of other hashtags in the datasets	23	<b>31</b>	54	<b>50</b>	7	57
No. of tweets containing other hashtags	18 <b>(5%)</b>	<b>27</b> (4.2%)	45 (4.5%)	<b>40</b> <b>(6.3%)</b>	7 (2%)	47 (4.7%)

These hashtags are analysable in terms of function as was done above with the main hashtags. Low- and high-frequency other hashtags form interdiscursive links that should not be overlooked in a qualitative analysis like the present endeavour because they help reveal stance. They may have several pragmatic functions such as marking relevance or expressing stance, affiliation, or evaluation, which were and will be discussed whenever encountered. As such, these hashtags could form sites of interdiscursivity within tweets, a discursive practice in which other discourses are indexed because they are considered relevant. Some tweeps linked the two main debates to broader discourses or other specific ones.

Other hashtags in the samples were found to pattern around mainly four functions. First, Tags may be a resource to create intertextual links but also to increase visibility as the main discussions are linked to broader topics such as ‘#السعودية’ (#Saudi), 4 times in

#1 and 12 times in #2, to locate the two main topics geographically and make them relevant to people interested in SA [223]. Another similarly broad hashtag is ‘#المراة\_السعودية’ (#SaudiWomen/#TheSaudiWoman), integrated within the tweets two times in #1 and once in #2, all of which were by male progressive tweeps to reach out to audiences concerned with issues pertaining to Saudi women, e.g. [224]. The two examples represent a progressive stance from #2.

**223.** #2M85 Increase in the number of *9anises* in #Saudi up to 4 million girls; as a result of high dowries and expensive marriage expenses.

**224.** #2M158 They do not stop depicting the #SaudiWoman as if she is a commodity whose expiry date finishes at a certain time

Alongside #1, other broad topical hashtags were sententially-integrated including ‘#المراة’ (#TheWoman) [225] and the two hashtags ‘#الأنثى و #الذكر’ (#TheFemale and #TheMale), which were juxtaposed together for comparison [226]. Also made relevant are the topic ‘#حقوق’ (#Rights) and ‘#قانونيات’ (#FemaleLawyers) to link to people who support human-rights or women-lawyers, here added as an after-thought [227]. These instances obviously express a progressive stance.

**225.** #1F247 Indeed, their appointment is [for] the morning. Is not the morning near? [unmarked Qur’anic verse 11:81] #TheWoman will rebel against the racism of the backward discriminatory minds and then I recommend weeping to the fanatics

**226.** #1F324 Go see who is blackening your faces [bringing you shame] abroad #TheMale or #TheFemale then judge and put controls

**227.** #1F122 When will the guardianship era over women end and she gets to be treated as a human being with complete eligibility?! #Rights #Legalities

Second, since hashtagging is a platform-based discursive practice, hashtags may be manipulated to link with marginal topics that the tweeps make relevant to the main issues, which may also have their legitimatory function in the presented arguments. In #1, the most frequent Tag added in conjunction with the main hashtag is its twin hashtag ‘#إصدار\_جواز\_بدون\_إذن\_ولي\_الأمر’ (#IssuingPassportWithoutPermission), which was introduced earlier in Section 4.2.1, mentioned 11 times, e.g. [228]. Some hashtags were embedded to relate to discourses of existing women-related campaigns like the national campaign that has been intensely discussed on Twitter since 2016: ‘#إسقاط\_نظام\_الولي\_عن\_المراة\_السعودية’ (#RemovingGuardianshipRuleForSaudiWomen) and variations of it include ‘#سعوديات\_نطلب\_إسقاط\_الولاية’ (with its twin English version #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen (c.f. Sections 2.3) [229]. With the help of the hashtag symbol, these interdiscursive links disseminate the messages to wider publics and to

global discourses about human rights and local discourse about Saudi women, here for a progressive positioning.

228. #1F346 The summary of the decision: suffer and then travel 😊 #1  
#IssuingAPassportWithoutPermission
229. #1F170 Change is a stage that needs to be managed professionally, I see beautiful things coming a coming decision of #RemovalOfGuardianshipRule  
In #2, the Tags ‘#تعدد\_الزوجات/#التعدد’ (#MultipleWives/polygamy) were appended to establish a ‘legitimatory’ connection to a discourse of ‘polygamous marriages [230]. The hashtag ‘#شرع\_الله’ (#WillOfGod) was added to a few of these arguments to annex a discourse of religion, which was implicitly intended for legitimation (see example [92] above). There were idiosyncratic hashtags suggested to parallel #2, namely ‘#عزوف\_الشباب\_عن\_الزواج’ (#ReluctanceOfMenTowardsMarriage) as a problem that has the same explanations as those of *9anis-hood* and ‘#ثلث\_السعوديين\_عزاب’ (#OneThirdOfSaudiMenAreSingle) as a logical inference of it [231]. Also, two hashtags were sarcastically offered by two users as replacements of the main #2, also for mockery: ‘#ثلث\_السعوديات\_مريحين\_روسهم’ (#OneThirdOfSaudiWomenAreLivingComfortably) and ‘#ثلث\_السعوديات\_يتمسكن\_بالحياة’ (OneThirdOfSaudiWomenHoldOnToLife) [232].
230. #2M690 The solution is clear it is #Polygamy
231. #2M633 So without doubt more than #OneThirdOfSaudiMenAreBachelors  
how come you did not create a hashtag for us
232. #2F547 The hashtag is wrong 😞 !! It should be like this  
#OneThirdOfSaudiWomenAreLivingComfortably

Third, the two types of ‘Tags’ and ‘Commentary’ hashtags overlap in referential hashtags, i.e. hashtags that refer to external realities (Shapp, 2014). Invoking national as well as international people or bodies can have affiliative or disaffiliative functions and can help inferring a contributor’s position on the respective, or other, subject matters. Examples of these in #1 include references ‘#السيداو’ (#SEDAW) as the international body of the UN committee (SEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) (see example [85] next chapter), where the tweeps were signalling a conservative stance aligning with the policymakers and misaligning with foreign entities, respectively. Egyptians who are known to the Saudis to have sweet talk that can seduce Saudi women if they travel were pulled into the discussion using the Tags ‘#المصريين’ or ‘#المصري’ (#Egyptian(s)). Here the function is both referential and disaffiliative [233].

- 233.** #1M426 Let the #Egyptians not get upset with us but most of them sell talk [are sweet taking] that a sweet word from #AnEgyptian selling talk would drive the thickest woman let alone if she was .. deprived [emotionally and sexually]
- Similarly, in #2 referential hashtags functioned as interdiscursive links to refer to how the women from ‘#سوريا و#المغرب’ (#Syria and #Morocco) were presented as alternative wives for Saudi men who are criticised for marrying them when they cannot afford the expenses to marry Saudi women, thus increasing the rates of *9anis*-hood [234]. It is mocked as a not so patriotic behaviour and hence links to a nationalist discourse and a discourse about marriage to non-Saudis.
- 234.** #2M631 If the obstacles of polygamy are not facilitated then this one-third will become half and the youth of #Saudi who want polygamy will deceive to win the mermaids of #Morocco and #Syria
- Referential cases were also oriented domestically. This category in #1 includes ‘#الملك\_سلمان’ (#KingSalman) and ‘#سلمان\_الحزم’ (#SalmanOfResolution) (examples [19 & 20] above), which were intended to express support for the king’s military action in Yemen and hails to the sovereign to invite his support, and addresses ‘#الجوازات’ (the governmental body for #Passports) to make legitimated requests or criticism of change direct [235].
- 235.** #1M491 The steps of Satan #Liberalism comes one by one until it gets to the Saudi women into the lowest level of immorality #ThePassports #Saudi
- In #2, the governmental entity of ‘#وزارة\_الخدمة\_المدنية’ (#MinistryOfCivilService) as well as one of its benefits ‘#بدل\_السكن’ (#HousingAllowance) were invoked to associate the issue of delayed marriage with the economic problems of unemployment, low income, and real-estate inflation for legitimating a request for governmental financial, e.g. [236]. With the ‘request’ hashtag ‘#زوجني\_طال\_عمرِك’ (#HelpMeGetMarriedMayYouLiveLong), the issue was linked to unemployment by addressing the tweet to a financially- or politically-enabled personnel to vent the tweep’s frustration and inability to get married for financial reasons [237].
- 236.** #2M191 The reason is that half the Saudi youth are unemployed  
unemployment is one of main causes of Saudi girls’ *9anis*-hood  
#MinistryOfCivilServices
- 237.** #2M101 #HelpMeGetMarriedMayYouLiveLong Not employing us correlates with *9anis*-hood so that when a young man is unemployed for years he causes a girl who is a few years younger than him to miss the chance [of getting married] and this is how *9anis*-hood happens

Fourth, these referential hashtags were sometimes used to indict a group of people with an ideological orientation in the national sphere, expressing an oppositional stance against them and/or their intentions. While it was mentioned many times in both hashtag threads, ‘liberalism’ was hashtagged only once in #1, as the hashtag ‘#الليبرالية’ /allibra:liyah/ (#Liberalism) ([235] above), and several times in #2 as ‘المشروع #الليبرالي’ /almašruw9 allibra:ly/ (#TheLiberalist Project) ([147] above). Most of these references were employed by a conservative tweep, who ironically calls himself ‘a liberalist’, for criticism and derogation accusing liberalists of exploiting women for sex and reproduction. It reveals a shared sentiment among conservatives that liberalists target women because it serves them to keep women unmarried, unsupervised, and vulnerable. As such, the underlying assumption implicates the previously-suggested discourse about women’s irrationality and vulnerability, c.f. Section 5.2.1.3. These accusations indicate that the term ‘liberal’ has negative connotations and is vilified by associating it with a foreign conspiracy to corrupt the Saudi society. To add to the stigma of being a liberalist, the same user who brought the liberalist ideological orientation into the discussion used the derogative evaluative hashtags ‘#ليبروفاشي’ /librofa:šiy/ (#Liberofascist) and ‘#بغال\_الليبرالية’ /biGa:l allibra:liyah/ (#LiberalistMules) to offend the proponents of liberalism, see example [76] in the next chapter. Hence, it becomes clear that the tweep aims to misalign with this group of women’s rights supporters.

Finally, evaluative hashtags may be said to have similar functions as Tags. For example, the hashtag ‘#قرار\_تتمناه’ (#ADecisionYouWishFor) (c.f. examples [22 and 24]) may be topical but it has evaluative keywords that convey stance, i.e. to express a desire a change that does not necessarily serve the situation of women, respectively. Evaluative or Commentary hashtags were used to direct criticism, mockery, irony, or sarcasm. The situation of women’s travel in #1 was evaluated twice as consisting of ‘#تناقضات\_فاخرة’ (#MajesticContradictions) (e.g. [211] above), or as an example of ‘#هراء\_ديني’ (#ReligiousNonSense), which is a mitigated criticism of the mainstream religious school [238]. On the contrary, ‘#ظلم’ (#Oppression) and the curse ‘#اللعة’ (#Damn) were more direct expressions of dissent, e.g. [239]. This type tends to be idiosyncratic and so is of low frequency, but beside stance taking they were embedded as disclaimers.

**238.** #1M754 Again #ReligiousNonSense

**239.** #1F888 Imagine that my father agrees for me to travel ; but the reason for travel is not liked by the judge and he forbids me from travelling 🤔 ~  
#Damn

The conservative opponents of progress were often dismissed in progressive discourses with idiosyncratic evaluative hashtags, e.g. ‘#طز\_بمذاهبكم\_وتكفيركم\_وطايفيتكم\_وأمراضكم’ (#ToHellWithYourSectsTakfiriIdeasAndDiseases) which was meant to derogate the ideology that drives establishing restrictions for women [240]. Another evaluative hashtag takes the form of a request ‘#أختاه\_استشرفي\_بعيدا\_عن\_راسي’ (#SisterPretendToBeHonourableAwayFromMyHead) that is dismissive of other female anti-change tweeps in the hashtag, considering them ‘pretentious’ [241].

240. #1F752 To that who put the controls I say  
#ToHellWithYourSectsTakfiriIdeasAndDiseases and your stinky  
mind you dignify the *Daeshi* people and ignore us as if we had  
scabies

241. #1M429 #DearSisterPretendToBeChasteAwayFromMyHead  
We saw girls supporting reckless drivers inside the country and we  
saw people like AlManea [a murdered study-abroad student] may  
God bless her soul abroad

Functioning as sort of a disclaimer, the negative command ‘#سؤال\_منطقي\_لحد\_يكفرني’ (#JustALogicalQuestionDoNotCallMeKafir) was inserted alongside #1 in [242], alluding to an awareness on the part of that contributor of risks involved in posting a tweet to the public debate. Yet, a tweet containing such a hashtag as a device for positionality extends the dialogic nature of the stance acts as atypical because it may lead to hasty judgements and harsh replies. Another type of disclaimers includes an invocation of the name of God ‘#حسبي\_الله\_وكفى’ (#GodIsAllINeedAndHeIsEnough), an expression commonly used at times of distress [243]. At a first glance, it is not clear whether the contributor of this post was distressed by the situation of Saudi women’s in general, the travel controls in particular, the news about the newly suggested controls, or by change in general. That it was contributed by a female contributing online to this hashtag makes it likely that she was putting forward a progressive stance and venting frustration at one or all the first three options, but not the last.

242. #1F82 What is the difference between travelling domestically a thousand  
kms without a consent or a *maHram* or a 10 kms internationally with  
a *maHram* and a consent #1  
#JustALogicalQuestionNobodyCallsMeKafir [a disbeliever]

243. #1F862 I ask God the Greatest for forgiveness and I repent to Him  
#GodIsAllINeedAndHeIsEnough

Contributors to #2 used Commentary hashtags to evaluate the phenomenon of *9anis-*hood in terms of the difficulty to get married. For example, ‘#واقع\_مرير’ (#ABitterReality)



describe *9anis*-hood as bitter and blames it on dowries [244]. The definition of the word ‘*9anis*’ was interrogated in terms of what ages it covers and negatively evaluated through the hashtagged Arabic sentence ‘#تفكير\_غريب’ (#WhatAWeirdWayOfThinking) [245].

244. #2M642 How would it not increase [the percentage of *9anises*] and her family ask for a dowry that would have provided the livelihood of an African tribe for a year 🥰! #ABitterReality
245. #2F357 I think the one-third that you’re talking about are between 19 and 25 #WeirdWayOfThinking

While mentions may not have played out as significant in the present datasets as vital hyperlinked resources for interdiscursivity within the tweets, hashtags were utilised mainly to link the key debates to broader or more specific themes, to invite domestic or international figures or entities into the ongoing conversations, or to add evaluation or mockery, and to guard against evaluation through disclaimers.

## 5.5 Conclusion

As was established earlier, language not only reflects existing social realities and attitudes but also actively constructs social relations. Therefore, it was important to explore the discourses produced when the Saudis made sense of their own experience as they engaged in online discussions about important topics pertaining to their day-to-day activities. This chapter has presented a detailed analysis of the salient gendered discourses found in the samples and the relationship between them, illustrating a great overlap in the way they link together. Traces of an overarching Discourse of Gender-Difference-As-Dominance were defining gender relations in terms of hierarchy and patriarchy. This Discourse of Patriarchy, which epitomises what Fairclough (2001) calls ‘power behind discourse’, was mutually supported by two discourses: male-dominance and female-subordination. A Discourse of Gender Equality was emerging as a competing Gender-Difference Discourse. These discourses were undergoing evaluation by the contributors. After touching on other peripheral discourses that had various functions within the discussions, the chapter concludes with an exploration of the use of Twitter-specific affordances as tools to create hyperlinked interdiscursive links within tweets.

Overall, these findings reveal that the identified discourses were drawn upon by conservative and progressive tweeps, across the two debates, to contextualise their arguments and express their stance. The diverse positions taken up by them while they endorsed, dismantled, or transformed the social constructions embedded in these discourses, point to a growing competition between non-egalitarian and egalitarian

discourses in these hashtag threads. The discussions arguably extend beyond the rather-specific topics being debated to broader negotiations of religion, culture, ideology, and gender identity, which dictate power relations between social groups. Although manifestations of the macro-level discursive strategies of perpetuation, dismantling, and transformation have surfaced already, they will be the focus of the next chapter and the various linguistic means employed by tweeps to achieve them as they recontextualised received ways of thinking.

## **Chapter 6: The utilisation of discursive strategies**

Having operationalised CDA with the DHA triangulating approach to establish a connection between the tweets and the broader social ideologies, the previous chapter has identified that, beyond content-related themes, there is a high-level social order, or ‘Capital D Discourse’, and other ‘small d’ discourses, social constraints, and stereotypes that support, which were brought into the discussions through various interdiscursive links in individual tweets for various functions, i.e. stance taking and affiliation (Wodak et al., 2009:30). While analysing the arguments in these two women-related hashtag debates, the contributors were found to skilfully and dynamically interact with one another and present their arguments in a one-to-many format while deploying a repertoire of discursive strategies to position themselves against the discourses they drew on, revealing conservative or progressive standpoints. Discursive strategies are ‘goal-oriented practices’ intended for particular outcomes: linguistic, psychological, social, or political (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Such strategies are more or less automated and not necessarily planned (ibid:44-5).

Therefore, the next step towards understanding the gendered roles and power relations on such an inclusive discursive space on Twitter hashtags was looking at the use of discursive strategies to express ideological stance against the background of previously-identified culturally-shared discourses. This chapter aims to present a selection of the discursive strategies that are employed to perpetuate, subvert, or disrupt traditional discourses. It attempts to articulate the patterns and dynamics with which various discursive strategies interact to serve these macro-functions into a theory that aims to expose common-sense notions which derive from actual historical social constructions.

### **6.1 An overview**

Drawing on relevant strategies from Wodak and Reisigl (2009:94), (Wodak et al., 2009:34), and van Leeuwen (2008), the approach to the analysis of discursive strategies was triangulated twice, first in the DHA approach to content, strategies and means of realisations, and then again in the approach to the discursive strategies so that various levels of their functions could be identified. This was clarified on Table 8 in Section 4.6.3, where the micro-functions were structured to parallel the third micro-level in DHA

(Wodak et al., 2009:34). This approach shows that linguistic means and rhetorical tropes, i.e. figures of speech where words mean more than what is proper to them in a certain context, realised various meso-level discursive strategies, which in turn serve other macro-level strategies (Kwon, Clarke, and Wodak, 2014). As illustrated in the analysis of four sampled tweets under Section 4.6.5, there is an overlap between various discourses and strategies as well as the means used to achieve them. Since there is no one-to-one correspondence between any discursive strategy and means of realisation/micro-strategies, repetitions may be unavoidable again in this chapter.

After working abductively between the RQs, the empirical data, and the identified discourses, the coded segments of the linguistic and rhetorical devices employed by contributors were closely examined through these three lenses mentioned above before they were integrated and streamlined against the most salient and presentable groupings of strategies. The referencing system to examples in this chapter remains the same as Chapter 5:Chapter 5, but they will be drawn from both hashtags without separation, a full list of which are found in Appendix IV [enclosed CD].

The following strategies represent a bird's eye overview of the discursive strategies organised based on the stance they were used to express, anti-change or pro-change. Although these two main stances were emphasised for pragmatic and organisational purposes, they are considered on a continuum and this is acknowledged in support of the adopted post-structuralist perspective. The absence of the macro-strategy of construction on this continuum indicates that it was embedded within the other macro-/meso-strategies pursued by tweeps and this is evidence for the starting point of this thesis, that existing social constructions are reflected in discourse while they are being 'recontextualised' in the hashtag debates at hand. Within conservative and progressive discourses, six social actors were represented in the discussions, namely policymakers, religious authorities, conservative groups, progressive groups, women, and men, and various representations of them strategically support the stance being expressed.

## **6.2 Discursive strategies for anti-change contributors**

Tweeps who were expressing an anti-change or conservative stance utilised the two macro-strategies of perpetuation of existing gendered social constructions and practices, in which gender roles and relations are encoded, and dismantling arguments presented by

their progressive opponents through delegitimation. A summary of the various discursive strategies embedded within these macro-strategies is presented below in Table 20.

*Table 20: A summary of the discursive strategies employed by anti-change tweeps*

Macro-strategies	Meso-strategies	Means of realisation
6.2.1. Perpetuating existing social constructions		
	6.2.1.1. Social-actor representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-pronouns (direct/indirect/vague references),</li> <li>-categorisation,</li> <li>-relational identification,</li> <li>-physical identification,</li> <li>-functionalisation,</li> <li>-possessivation,</li> <li>-genericisation (plural form metonymical references),</li> <li>-negative evaluations (of the other),</li> <li>-nomination</li> </ul>
	6.2.1.2. Stereotyping and polarising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-US vs. THEM,</li> <li>-differentiation,</li> <li>-symbolism (overdetermination),</li> <li>-(animalising/objectifying) metaphors -analogies,</li> <li>-code-mixing Arabic and English script,</li> <li>-mock suggestions,</li> <li>-inversion,</li> <li>-expressing emotion, e.g. derogation, flirtatiousness, laughter or sarcasm (w/o emojis),</li> <li>-polarisation through opposition or topoi (disaster, threat, etc.)</li> </ul>
	6.2.1.2. Legitimating the status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-intertextual links to religious discourse,</li> <li>-code choice of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or dialectal Arabic (DA),</li> <li>-naturalisation,</li> <li>-intensification using hyperboles, war-based metaphors, superlative adjectives, negation, or topoi (e.g. burden, problem, catastrophe)</li> </ul>

6.2.2. Dismantling calls for change	-derogation and disparagement (negative-other presentation), by derogatory metaphors, negative associations (collocations for prosody), -topoi (danger, threat), -emphasis on difference (heteronomy) or similarity within it for unification (autonomy) (Wodak et al., 2009) or uniqueness of the country (differentiation) --Intensification to warn against change by repetition (of words or punctuation marks marks), emoji, code choice and switch between MSA and DA varieties of language, hyperboles using special metaphors, questions, or topoi -mitigation through nominalisation and passivation
-------------------------------------	--

### 6.2.1 Perpetuating existing social constructions

Perpetuation is mainly the macro-strategy of the conservative pro-change tweeps. They were categorising and referencing social actors, describing actions, reiterating widely-shared gendered stereotypes, and polarising gender identities, ideological groups or moral values and behaviours as good and bad while presenting justifications of these perpetuated constructions or social habits.

Various representations of the six social actors who were invoked in the hashtags were depicted in ways to support a conservative stance that is approving of the status quo or disapproving of change. These can be summarised as follows with a focus on how references to them represent, stereotype, or polarise them.

#### 6.2.1.1 *Social-actor representation*

First, policymakers were projected as protectors of patriarchy by institutionalising rules that privilege men and subordinate women, e.g. the guardianship rule. This category includes governmental representatives, i.e. judges, *sheikhs*, or governmental spokesmen, who are authorised to oversee the application of these rules and could be deciding for a

woman's matters when she does not have a *maHram* or is in conflict with him. Patterns of representation of this category can be summarised as references to the country, the King, the government, or its entities.

References to the country were nominated frequently in Arabic, such as the hashtag 'السعودية' /alsu9uwdiyyah/ (#Saudi). It was mainly included, integrated within the grammatical structure of the content as a premodification of another noun, e.g. 'بنات السعودية' /bana:t alsu9uwdiyyah/ (girls of Saudi), 'شباب السعودية' /šaba:b alsu9uwdiyyah/ (male youth of Saudi), or circumstantialised after a proposition, 'في السعودية' /fiy alsu9uwdiyyah/ (in Saudi) and 'نادراً في السعودية' /na:diran fiy alsu9uwdiyyah/ (rare in Saudi). There were also references to 'the/this/your/my/our' country, and 'the/our' government, 'our/the/this' 'land/nation', i.e. the frequent possessivation deactivates the role of the people taking the stance in the argument (van Leeuwen, 2008) or a means of expressing affiliation or establishing unification to build the argument on. Such emphasis may be explained by a desire to perpetuate the singularity of the nation, by addressing locals or locating the tweets in that geographical space, or, if hashtagged, expanding the audience to anyone who is interested in Saudi affairs.

A few references nominated the King with the hashtags 'الملك\_سلمان' /#KingSalma:n/ (#KingSalman) or '#سلمان\_الحزم' /#Salma:n\_alHazm/ (#SalmanOfResolution) or functionalised him as 'الملك' /almalik/ or 'الحاكم' /alHa:kim/ (the King), which were mostly used to invite the support of the King for a conservative stance. The pronouns 'أنتم' /?antum/ (you) and 'كم' /\_kum/ were sometimes used to mitigate the force of suggestions to the government using imperative-form verbs in conservative legitimacy discourses, e.g. 'ضعوا' /Da9uw/ (establish (new rules)), e.g. example [1] in the previous chapter. More frequent was the use of passivation or nominalisation to mitigate criticism of policy changes or to mitigate the force of requests while legitimating them, e.g. as 'يجب تدخل الحكومة' /yajib tadaxxul alHukuwmah/ (the government's interference is necessary) as will be demonstrated later in examples [44 and 45], Section 6.2.2. These choices implicate affiliation with policymakers and may also be employed to encourage people to conform to rules because they originate from the government. Such representation perpetuates the discourse of the King as the patriarch and the expectations that the population has of the government to solve their problems like a father solves domestic problems, examples of which were illustrated in Chapter 5, c.f. examples [19-30].

Second, the religious authorities may be a category with a wide coverage. It includes mentions of 'الله' /alla:h/ (*Allah/God*), the Prophet or his wives, canonical texts 'القرآن' /alqur'a:n/ (*Qur'an*) or 'الكتاب' /alkita:b/ (*the Book*), 'الحديث' /HadiyΘ/ or 'السنة' /alsunnah/ (*Prophetic teachings*), 'الشريعة' /alšariy9ah/ or 'شرع الله' /šar9 alla:h/ or 'الشرع' /alšar9/ (*shariah/will of God*), 'الدين/الإسلام' (religion/Islam), and 'الفقه' /alfiqh/ (*fiqh/jurisdiction* or any of its rulings), e.g. 'محرم' /maHram/ (*maHram*), 'ولي أمر' /waliy ʔamr/ (*wali amr*), 'حلال' /Hala:l/ (*Halal/permisible*), and 'حرام' /Hara:m/ (*Haraam/not permisible*). The name of God was frequently included in oaths and requests or supplications that index the contributors' Islamic identity, but the data shows that most cited religious texts and the words Islam, religion and *shariah* were appealed to in conservative discourses to legitimate certain practices, e.g. guardianship and polygamy, as illustrated in the use of religious discourse for stance taking, Section 5.3.2. Islamic scholars who preach for conventional discourses were included generally as 'أهل الدين' /?ahluddiyn/ (*the people of religion*) and were occasionally nominated as individuals, for instance references to 'ابن تيمية' (Ibn Taymiyah), 'البصري' (AlBasri), or 'الشيخ العريفي' (*Sheikh alOraifi*). These invocations were mainly intended to perpetuate the necessity of traditional patriarchal norms.

While the representation of the third anti-change social actors will be discussed later with the discursive strategies of the fourth pro-change social actors who welcome social change and condemn discriminatory practices, the latter party were often vilified by the former. Although there were fewer mentions of the progressives than the conservatives in the data, they were exclusively categorised negatively in terms of '#ليبروفاشية' /#librufa:šiyiyah/ (*#libro-fascism*), as 'الليبراليين (السعوديين)' /allibra:liyiyn (alsu9uwdiyiyn)/ ((Saudi)liberals), 'دخلاء البلد' /duxala:ʔ Albalad/ (*intruders to the country*), 'دعاة تحرير المرأة' /do9a:t taHriyr almarʔah/ (*women's liberation advocates*), or 'دعاة الانحلال والمجون' /do9a:t alinHila:l walmujuwn/ (*advocates of decay and shamelessness*). These negative representations gave human-rights advocates and their causes an unfavourable prosody in combination with such adjacent words as 'نجاسة' /naja:sah/ (*dirt/profanity*), 'قطيع' /qaTiy9/ (*herd*), and 'خطوات الشيطان' /xuTuwa:t alšayTa:n/ (*steps of Satan*), incriminating them by proposing they are influenced by foreign agendas 'مشروع' /mashruw9/ (*project*). Hence, even though the progressives do not necessarily affiliate with any foreign or liberal parties lest it could harm their cause, there were rough politicisation of them using polarising forms. Such polarisation was used to undermine their national efforts to change



the conditions of women, which will be exemplified under Section 6.2.3 **Error!**  
**Reference source not found.**

On the one hand, women as a social group were included and represented on a divide between those who follow exclusive traditional social norms and those who are not happy about conforming to them and feel victimised by them, i.e. subjected and beneficialised in van Leeuwen's terms (2008), as demonstrated previously in Section 5.2.1.3. They were represented mainly using relational identification strategies defining who they are in terms of endearment, e.g. 'عزيزتي' /*9aziyzati*/ (my dear) or 'أختاه' /*uxta:h*/ (my sister, a form of addressing based on religious affiliation without the existence of family ties), family relations, e.g. 'ابنتك' /*ibnatak*/ (your daughter), 'أمك' /*ummuk*/ (your mother), or religious affiliation (religionyms), e.g. 'مسلمة' /*muslimah*/ (Muslim woman) in normative discourses. They were also represented relationally in terms of nationality to differentiate and ascribe a specific, rather unique, identity to them as 'بنت بلدي' /*bint baladi*/ (the daughter of my country), 'المرأة السعودية' /*almarʔah alsu9udiyah*/ (Saudi woman), 'السعوديات' /*alsu9uwdiyya:t*/ (Saudi women), 'السعودية' /*alsu9uwdiyah*/ (Saudi [woman]), 'الأنثى السعودية' /*alunθa: alsu9uwdiyah*/ (Saudi female), or 'البنات السعودية' /*albint alsu9uwdiyah*/ (Saudi girl). These forms assimilate Saudi women as a typical and homogeneous group while having 'engendering' and 'essentialising' metonymical functions within the tweets.

In conservative discourses perpetuating traditional definitions of women, marital status served for relational identification and was more common in #2 with references to a woman as 'المتزوجة' /*almutazawwijah*/ (the married one), 'المطلقة' /*almuTallaqah*/ (the divorced), 'الناشر' /*alna:šiz*/ (the disobedient), 'الأرملة' /*alʔarmalah*/ (the widowed), 'العانس' /*al9a:nis*/ (the spinster), or 'العزباء' /*al9azba:ʔ*/ (the single one). The same applies to age-based physical attribution as more diverse nuances exist, referring to women as 'الطفلات' /*alTifla:t*/ (infants), 'الفتيات' /*alfataya:t*/ or 'الشابات' /*alša:ba:t*/ (young women), 'العجز' /*al9ujz*/ (old), 'الناضجات' /*alna:Diya:t*/ (the mature ones), 'المراهقات' /*almura:hiqa:t*/ (the teenaged ones), 'أم 20' /*um 20*/ (that who is at the age of 20), 'العانس التي تعدت الثلاثين' /*al9a:nis allatti ta9addat alθala:θiyn*/ (the *9anis* is the one who is over 30). Physical attribution also includes referring to them by a common bodily feature to appraise, e.g. 'البيضاء' /*albayDa:ʔ*/ (the white one, a somatisation based on colour), or 'المزة' /*muzzah*/ (the pretty one), or to put down, e.g. 'يا ناقصات الجمال' /*ya na:qiSa:t aljama:l*/ (you who lack beauty). Van Leeuwen (2008) considers this strategy to be an 'objectification'.

Women were also labelled as ‘الملكة’ /almalikah/ (the queen) or variants of it, which were used at least ten times across the four gender-based sub-datasets to represent all Saudi women. Subordinating functions of this metonymical metaphor as a supporting discourse of a Patriarchal Discourse in debates about Saudi women were previously-discussed. This metaphor was popularised to limit and control the social functions of women. Categorisation of women based on behaviour and ideological stance were evident in conservative discourses positively represented in the normative description ‘ذات الدين’ /ḏa:t aldiyn/ (one who is pious) or negatively in ‘الليبراليات’ /libra:liyiya:t/ (liberal women) (example [71] later in the chapter), ‘الشجرة المثمرة’ /alšajarah almuṪmirah/ (the fruitful tree), and ‘العاهرة’ /al9a:hirah/ (bitch), as illustrated in examples [1 and 2] below. Such representations that homogenise women were pervasive and rely on the pragmatic fallacy of ‘hasty generalisation’, typical in prejudiced discourses to perpetuate polarisation (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001:63). They have been internalised as types of women in the Saudi context that they can be found as more or less fixed constructions perpetuated in pro-change and anti-change discourses alike.

1. #1M39 God is true [when He said in the Qur’an] (And they think every shout is about them) whenever people talk about honour and chastity the bitch and the *dayuṪ* [a male who has no jealousy] cry and lose their minds, they lost their dignity and so hold grudge against its people
2. #2M983 The fruitful tree is the one that gets thrown at by stones and surely they will say about the girls of our country *9anis*es and and and and and because really they are: the sweetest and most precious and prettiest and most complete

On the other hand, men are included and represented in the discussion as the social group, mainly in relational terms as husbands, fathers, sons, *maHrams*, *wali amrs*, etc., and given a more active role with such verbs as ‘يحميها’ (protect her, example [45]), ‘يهزم’ (defeat *9anis*-hood, example [64]), and ‘يبحثوا عن الزوج الصالح’ (look for a good husband [3]). A spatial metaphor was used in #2 while referring to the custodian as having the power ‘in the hands’ of accepting or looking for a good match for his ‘women’, giving this role a sense of urgency ‘before there comes a time’ to caution for *9anis*-hood.

3. #2M502 The solution is in the hands of their custodians it is time that they look for a good husband before there comes a time they will have to pay him the dowry

These expressions subject women to the approval and consent of *wali amrs*’ for travel in #1 or their demands and men’s initiation of proposals for marriage in #2. Other institutionalised identifications present in the data are ‘معرفة’ /mu9arrif/ (someone that

can confirm the identify of a woman at court because she is covered), ‘مرافق’ /mura:fiq/ (companion), ‘وكيل’ /wakiyl/ (representative), and ‘وصي’ /waSiy/ (custodian/trustee). There is hierarchy in operation that, generally, ‘maHram’ was often employed as a euphemism to mitigate the power given to ‘wali amr’ over the women although there is a difference between the two as explained earlier under Section 5.2.1.2.

Other categorisations of men exist that are related to occupation, e.g. ‘مدير’ /mudiy/ (director), ‘رئيس محكمة’ /ra?iys maHkamah/ (court president), ‘مسنول’ /mas?uwl/ (administrator), and ‘دكاترة’ /dakatrah/ (doctors), social problematisation through negationyms, e.g. ‘عاطل عن العمل’ /9a:Til 9an al9amal/ (unemployed), on behaviour, e.g. ‘ديوث’ /daiyuwθ/ (a negative term for a male who feels no jealousy, c.f. example [36] later) and ‘سكرجي’ /sakarji/ (drunkard), or based on sexual identification, homosexuality in ‘لوطي’ /luwTiy/ (gay, example [218], previous chapter), and ‘المثليين’ /almiθliyiyn/ (the gay men, example [220], previous chapter), or heterosexuality when criticising negatively sanctioned behaviour in the culture with ‘سربوت’ /sarbuwt/ (thug, c.f. example [216] in the previous chapter).

Nationalistic discourse was embedded in such representations as ‘مواطن’ /muwaTin/ (citizen), ‘جندياً’ /jundiyyan/ (soldier, example [65] below), and ‘بطل قومي’ /baTal qawmiy/ (national hero, example [66]) within conservative discourses discussing marriage and polygamy. For this reason, they were defined relationally in terms of religion (religionyms), e.g. ‘مسلم’ /muslim/ (Muslim man), or nationality to ascribe a specific rather unique but homogenising identity to them as ‘الرجل السعودي’ /alrajul alsu9udiy/ (the Saudi man), ‘السعودي’ /alrajul alsu9uwdiy/ (the Saudi man), or ‘سعودي’ /su9u:diy/ (Saudi-male and female), which identified based on the space they belong to (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Such references as as ‘رجال بلدي’ /rija:l baladi/ (the men of my country), or ‘رجال السعودية’ /rija:l alsu9uwdiyyah/ (the men of Saudi) underline the oft-emphasised ‘singularity’ Saudi identity, i.e. emphasis on ‘sameness’ or ‘national singularity’ (Wodak et al., 2009:141). Genericisation in references to Saudis as ‘السعوديين’ /alsu9u:diyyiyn/ (Saudi men in a generic form), although a masculine plural form, was commonly used for men and women. The singular forms ‘Saudi man’ and ‘Saudi male’ were used metonymically to stand for the whole social group.

Besides relational references to them as *mahram* ‘fathers’, ‘sons’, or ‘brothers’, men were often addressed with relational endearment terms as well as ‘عزيزي’ /9aziyyiy/ (my dear), ‘ياخي’ /ya:xiy/ (hey my brother), or essentialist ones as ‘يا رجال’ /ya: rija:l/ (hey

men), or ‘يا شباب’ /ya: šaba:b/ (hey young men) to invite them for action, e.g. polygamy. Marital status as a relational identification strategy was also employed in references to men, especially in #2, such as ‘زوج مناسب’ /zawj muna:sib/ (a suitable husband), ‘العزوبي’ /al9uzuwbij/ (the single man), ‘أرمل’ /?armal/ (a widower), and ‘المعدد’ /almu9addid/ (the polygamous man) by self-proclaimed male contributors in their marriage ads or in their passionate wishes for *9anises* to find husbands. The same applies in self-descriptive age-related terms such as ‘شاب’ /ša:b/ (young man) and ‘الواحد عمره 25’ /alwa:Hid 9umruh 25/ (the one who is aged 25) or the plural form ‘شباب’ /alšaba:b/ (young men).

Defining men with physical-identification categories was not common. When adopted, it was to refer to them positively but abstractly based on their looks as ‘وسيم’ /wasiyim/ (handsome) or ‘خفة’ /xaggah/ (very handsome) or negatively based on what they wear or how they look as ‘أبوسروال وفانيلة’ /?abu sirwa:l wa: fa:niyilah/ (The one who wears the typical Saudi undergarments, the [white] underpants and shirt) or ‘أبو كرشة’ /?abu kiršah/ (the one with a big belly). Many of these representations have gained a metonymical function to create the fallacy of ‘hasty generalisation’ in prejudiced discourse against similar ones used for women.

#### 6.2.1.2 *Stereotyping and polarising*

Within social actor representation, stereotyping, which entails the categorisation of people, is a key strategy for creating a socio-cognitive image of women that gets internalised by members of a society, fuelling prejudiced social practices. It polarises social groups into US and THEM in a way that is never ideologically value-free, ‘the ‘ideological square’ underlined in relevance to racist discourses against immigrants in van Dijk (2006). These categories are culturally deployed to legitimate discriminatory practices against women, i.e. Saudi women as queen, lacking in mind, irrational, vulnerable, domestic, and a source of *fitnah* /finah/ (temptation). They are propagated to justify traditional discourses but are rarely justified. That is why a full account of these stereotypes was given under the discourses of subordination, c.f. Section 5.2.1.3. This strategy was additionally realised through speaking about them in consumer-related objectifying terms in marriage, deploying code-mixing English and Arabic script, mock suggestions, inversion of a campaign’s slogan, and directing flirtatious comments, laughter, and sarcasm at women.

While polarisation expresses opposed cognitions and the categorical division of people, it perpetuates the underlying social representations and ideologies at work in that social context (van Dijk, 2006). Some tweeps were found to perpetuate polarisation through rearticulating culturally-adopted overdetermined representations of women, such as the queen, the domestic, the vulnerable, or the ‘lacking in mind’, which hold them as symbols of the country’s conservative identity. Other micro-strategies were employed to polarise definitions of women as ‘good’ and ‘bad’, including circulating stereotypes and analogies with animals, sometimes intensified with the help of emojis, hyperboles or special metaphors, as well as describing the consequences of unsupervised travel and *9anis*-hood for women in terms of topoi, e.g. ‘disaster’, ‘catastrophe’, and ‘threat’. Topoi are taken-for-granted premises in a community that lead to accepting a conclusion. For the same purposes, the functionalisation of men as *maHrams* underwent some polarisation as well, drawing a distinction between a ‘good’ *maHram* who oversees the women under guardianship and a ‘bad’ one who lets them loose.

Objectification of women was perpetuated through commodifying references to them in #2, i.e. indexing a discourse of consumerism through analogies, sometimes combined with laughter. Whenever difficult marriage conditions were critiqued, it was sarcastically suggested that women ask for high dowries because view themselves as though they were expensive cars and that to spend money on the latter would be more value-wise [4], speaking of them in terms of ‘price’ and ‘value’ while disqualifying women as unworthy [5], or in terms of ‘take one, get two’ as a mock suggestion to solve the problem [6].

4. #2M915 As for the girl who wants her dowry to be 400 thousand don’t you feel that you’ve turned from a female to a Bentley [the car brand]? Look if I calculate it I’d rather get a Bentley better it does not spend [value-wise] 🙄
5. #2M537 I swear no one told you to increase the dowry price, and I wish the face [of the woman] is worth it, one [woman] turns out to have a face like a screwdriver and wanted 70 thousand for what oh baby 😂😂🙄?
6. #2M848 Whoever marries two should get the third as a gift

Code-mixing was employed to discuss women within a commercial discourse, marked between two red-dot emojis to match ‘sale’ signs on shops. This objectifying mock suggestion was meant to be derogative of women because of their high dowries and marriage expenses [7].

7. #2M39 إلى 4 ملايين السعودية #عدد العوانس في فتاة؛ نتيجة غلاء المهور وتكاليف الزواج خذ وحده sale ليش ما يسوون ووحده بلاش The number of *9anises* in #Saudi reaches 4 Million girls; the result of the high dowries and marriage expenses, why don't they offer a sale: marry one and take the other for free.

An inversion that draws on a discourse of a campaign against soaring car prices was found several times in the samples. The campaign was first introduced in Saudi (2008/9) but has since expanded to other Arabic countries including Egypt (2015/6), Morocco, Tunis, and Algeria with the hashtag (#خليها تصدي) (#LetItRust) (2018). It was originally titled 'خليها تصدي وموديلها تعدي' (let it rust and its model become old) but was invoked by some male tweeps who humorously call for the same trend to be applied to women whose guardians impose tribal racism or high dowries by letting them 'rust' in their father's houses [8]. The example shows that this move appropriated an analogy to legitimate male promiscuity abroad based on the complexity of marriage in SA. Such analogies, however, extend the dehumanisation of women.

8. #2M660 Yes the campaign of let her rust 🤪🏠😂 its reasons .. tribal intolerance and expensive dowries ..and the boys are keeping themselves busy with travels

The link made between women's *9anis*-hood and the financial burdens imposed on men for traditional marriages was dismissed based on a comparison to a man spending money to buy a car or travel with friends [9]. Although a mockery, it was also objectifying.


9. #2F40 And they say high dowries if it were a car he wants to buy he would have spent all his money and if it were a trip with his friends he would have paid and when the marriage issue is brought up he says expensive

By derogating Saudi women as demanding and drawing on the 'topos of burden', the conservative discourse about their irrationality was perpetuated as an explanation for men's abstinence from marriage in #2 [10]. This was indicative of an anti-change stance in as much as this depiction of irrationality has taken a different direction in new generations of women who know and ask for what they want after ages of being treated as 'passive' commodities exchanged between a male custodian and a husband.


10. #2M771 How does the young man marry when instead of being a support for her husband she becomes a heavy burden because of her endless requests


Hence, many male tweeps were perpetuating a traditional definition of women as receptive of their offerings, i.e. marriage proposals and dowries. A question asking where the *9anises* were was surrounded by an expression of love to women through the repetition of emoji hearts and kisses. This helps to guide the readers' interpretation of the comment as flirtatious [11]. For the same purpose, the 'burning flames' emoji was added to the imperative statement 'find me' a pretty woman to accentuate the word 'red hot' while describing women [12]. These examples continue traditional discourses that privatise women as sexual and domestic beings. The role of emojis as contextualisation cues in this kind of rhetoric to contextualise comments or intensify adjacent words by representing them visually is noticeable.


11. #2M847  where are the *9anises* 


12. #2M643 Find me a *muzzah* [a beauty] who is tall and expect to be rewarded hey red-hot [women] 

In continuation of this privatisation, the role of emojis in marking flirtatiousness is also clear where men were tweeting suggestive comments employing a word-play on the hashtag keyword 'control' to 'keep her in check' [13] or to help her travel by becoming her mahram [14] in #1 or marriage ads which were more frequent in #2 [e.g. 15], sometimes in as short as a single hand gesture to replace a word like 'me' or perhaps a phrase such as 'I'll take one' or 'I'll solve the problem of one' [16].





13. #1M401 I'm the one who is going to keep her in check 


14. #1M511 That she does not travel except with a *maHram* and if she doesn't have one she marries me 

15. #2M753 We're ready and available just give us the green light 

16. #2M920 

As contextualisation cues, hand pointers and number emojis were used in both hashtags to emphasise some normative statements about what a believing woman does or how she should be treated [17]. Evaluative emojis were also used to intensify disapproval of altered unpolarised gendered identities that are emerging and contributing to *9anis*-hood as a natural consequence [18]. Such comments were aimed at preserving traditional gender identities and definitions.

17. #1F713 Every  believing woman  knows the controls that the Prophet us told us about, and if we sincerely loved him we would follow him without  arguing 

18. #2F826 After the males have competed with them on femininity this is very natural 

The role of emojis of laughter was also evident in marking tweets as humorous to mitigate the mock suggestion that was indicative of traditional stereotyping of women as irrational [19]. Combined with sarcastic comparisons to prices of items in ‘hotel’s fridge’ [20] and to the market system of ‘offer’ and ‘demand’ [21], laughter helped to reveal the implicated objectification of women as commodities recurrent in #2.

19. #1F101 Half of Saudi’s girls will run away 😂😂😂
20. #2M60 The prices of marriage in Saudi [the country] are the same as the prices of items in the hotel’s fridge you should take from outside it’s cheaper for you the analogy is appropriate 😂😂  
hahahahahahaha
21. #2M590 If we follow their system of selling and buying (if the offer increases and the demand decreases the prices go down) relief is coming God’s willing 😂

Sarcastic remarks employed hyperboles as well. They were perpetuating traditional discourses that stereotype women as ‘lacking in ‘everything’ [22] or ‘irrational’ that whoever marries her should be ‘honoured’ as though it was a war victory, which also links it to discourses of fear of the consequences of arranged marriage and divorce [23].

22. #1M175 The woman is lacking in everything even in her looks so she needs makeup to complete her
23. #2M602 Whoever gets married these days should be honoured

Just as polarising as stereotypes, many notions were polarised and moralised as good or bad. The reiteration of traditional expectations that hold women responsible for the honour of their families and for representing the country’s religious values calls for an overdetermination of women’s role to be strategically implemented. Through interdiscursive links indexing a discourse about ‘الحجاب’ (headscarf/head and face cover as customary in SA) and emphasis using quotation marks, the following comments expressed a view of it as a symbol of the integrity and chastity of a woman. Women were portrayed in #1 in terms of black and white, good or bad. If she throws her headscarf when she travels, she is throwing away her manners as shown by the emphasis with quotation marks [24]. Abandoning it to follow fashion trends or to symbolise ‘false’ freedom, also emphasised with quotation marks, was paralleled with women’s loss of ‘cover’ in #2 and their rejection of advice to explain why ‘good’ men lost interest in them [25]. Such association reflects a deeper association between women’s freedom of choice and a lack of modesty as well as respect to the men in their lives.

24. #1F41 The most important is that she does not throw away her “manners” like she throws away her “scarf” when she takes off!



25. #2M535 The way men look at girls in this time has changed, because some of them [girls] have taken off modesty and cover [hijab] with the pretext of “fashion and freedom” and if you advise her she devours you alive 🏃

When a user was expressing an argument that linked the issue of travel controls with religious discourse about how Islam has dignified women, contributing multiple tweets to counter arguments about the need to liberate them, necessitated the use of emojis of sequence numbers in addition to the phrase ‘to be continued’ [26]. Using sequence number emojis again, women were placed in an evaluative scale between two extreme categories when it comes to their ethical values and moral behaviour and those judgements were presented in the name of ‘Islam’ [27].

26. #1M13 **2** Islam has dignified her [the woman] under her feel is paradise and the pleasing of the mother pleases God praise be to Him to be continued

27. #1M6 **6** Finally my sister Islam has dignified you with what is good for you (before the decision or after it there are the good and the wrongful [women]) so hold on to the religion

Surprisingly, depicting women as devious and rebellious to traditional definitions of them was also reinforced in #2. By relating experiences of ‘other women-friends’ who, after securing a husband as a ‘cover’, commit adulteries to express dissent solely because they were not allowed to choose their husbands, this female tweep demonstrated how these judgements are internalised and reiterated [28]. Such links to moral values tend to polarise women into good or bad and create an implicit connection between open-minded women and sin.

28. #2F248 I know [female] friends who would accept any man so she becomes a wife and then she starts cheating and dating even if he were a good person only because she did not see him from the beginning as a handsome man.

The exaggerated overdetermination of women’s behaviour leads to comparisons that attach positive and pejorative judgments to women in conservative discourses. Resistance to change manifested in the deployment of the topos of disaster/threat drawing on black/white metaphors. For example, if what is perceived as ‘religious’ controls were to be altered, a hyperbolic statement included two metaphors to caution against it, that of darkness and that of a weapon at the hands of a child [29]. Women’s travel was placed in analogy with ‘drinking wine’ as mutually not permissible and associated with ‘perversion’ [30]. With an assertive oath, the community was threatened by corruption and destruction if women were allowed unsupervised mobility after all those ‘suppressed

years' [31]. Furthermore, describing any progress in the situation of women through reliance on the 'topos of catastrophe' was bluntly expressed [32]. These were various ways in which the travel controls in #1 were rationalised in ways that aimed to preserve the status quo by relying on traditional stereotypes of women.

- 29. #1M520 Sharia law determined the controls so that if we left them you will regret having disasters darker than the darkest night and more dangerous than a weapon in the hands of a child
- 30. #1M214 That who demands travel controls for the woman is like that who demands controls for drinking alcohol 🇸🇦🇸🇦🇸🇦🇸🇦🇸🇦 ((no controls with perversion)) 🇸🇦🇸🇦🇸🇦
- 31. #1F778 I don't wish it applies because suppression generates a blast and if the Saudi woman travelled alone I swear she will lose it for all the suppressed years in one day and a night
- 32. #1M168 Catastrophe..that will open doors of corruption that were closed..

In comparison to marriage conditions in the West, the topos of 'disaster' in #2 was invoked to warrant a depiction of both women's and men's *9anis*-hood as leading to more 'corruption' in the society [33]. A passivated request for policymakers to facilitate marriage to Saudi women in order to prevent the percentage of *9anises* from increasing cautioned against (polygamous) Saudi men turning to non-Saudi women for marriage [34]. This is a polarising discourse of women, as Saudi and non-Saudi, as well.

- 33. #2M472 Best thing with foreigners is proposing with a ring and he goes down on one knee 🇸🇦 and it's over, I am afraid a day will come when corruption increases because of the bachelors and the 9anises
- 34. #2M631 If the obstacles of polygamy are not facilitated then this one-third will become half and the youth of #Saudi who want polygamy will deceive to win the mermaids of #Morocco and #Syria

In the data, we also find instances of polarising that related to men. For instance, analogies to animals were used to regulate the relationship between men and women. Men were portrayed to women in the hashtag, addressed as 'sister', as human 'wolves', which entails a depiction of women as goats/sheep [35]. This metaphor perpetuates the women-as-vulnerable or women-as-irrational discourses as well as boys-will-be-boys discourse, which is appropriated in SA into boys-are-wolves discourses, defining gender relations in terms of matters of the flesh.

- 35. #1M759 That she does not travel .. Sister ..the human wolves are trying to ambush you

Hence, men were not absolved of such normative forms of stereotyping and polarising based on the traditional masculine role ascribed to them within a *maHram*-as-protection discourse. If a man would allow women under his guardianship free will and mobility, he would be considered not a ‘good’ *mahram*. Rather, he would be negatively and assertively termed a ‘ديوث’ /daiyuwθ/, stripping him of his masculinity because of his abandonment of the cultural definition of masculinity that is associated with ‘jealousy’ and ‘protecting the honour’ of his women [36].

36. #1M67      A woman travelling abroad without *maHram* cannot be and whoever accepts that from amongst her *maHrams* then God be my witness he is *dayooth* [(someone who feels no jealousy) by all means

### 6.2.2 Legitimizing the status quo

The discursive recontextualisation of social practices involves not just their conversion into discourses but also the addition of contextually-sensitive legitimations of them. Negation, linguistic shifts to MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) as a more formal variety, intertextuality with religious discourse, naturalisation, and hyperboles, sometimes using superlative adjectives, were realisations of this strategy. Additionally, tweeps expressed their conservative position through standard argumentation schemes, or *topoi*, which draws on taken-for-granted premises in a community shown as enough reasons to accept a conclusion, e.g. *topos* of burden, problem, catastrophe, urgency, as well as comparison and time.

Strict interpretations of guardianship were legitimated using religious discourse in #1. This strategy invoked a discourse of ‘*maHram*-as-protection’ to negate that guardianship leads to treating a woman as ‘a minor’ [37]. To legitimate the controls, negation was found in the toolbox of some conservative tweeps, who speak on behalf of women, even if these women denied their need for protection [38]. Underlying this rhetoric is a depiction of women as vulnerable.

37. #1M599      If you only understand the wisdom of the guardianship rule in the religion it is fear for her not to reduce the woman and treat her like a minor..
38. #1M153      The woman cannot travel without a man she wants one to protect her even if she pretended here

To legitimate the ‘travel controls’ for women, they were given a religious character to construct the source of what women should be allowed to do or not as ‘Islamic’ and

not 'Saudi' [39]. This statement was addressed to 'liberalist mules' who were disparaged for advocating for change in women's conditions.

**39. #1M503** Travelling with *maHram* [male guardian] is from religion not from the State hey liberalist mules

It may be noticed that for conservative ends, the use of the formal writing form of Arabic (MSA) rather than Dialectal Arabic (DA) replicated the general patronising and patriarchal tone often directed at women, related it to religious discourse, and prescribed *maHram* as 'protection' in line with what was demonstrated under Section 5.2.1.2 [40]. 'Gender mixing' was stigmatised as lack of shyness. By means of negation and comparison with 'our mothers', arguments against guardianship were undermined in [41] and the notion of women as 'lacking' was perpetuated but redefined as 'who feels that way'. Here, the place of women is at home so that their sons would find their place outside and become 'officers, 'university professors', etc.

- 40. #1F527** الولي وضعه الله أب، و زوج، و ولد وليست محافل الاختلاط العالمية التي تخرج من ينتقصن دينهن ويتبرأن من حيائهن The custodian was assigned by God a father, a husband, and a son and not the international events of gender mixing which produce those who have no respect for their religion and let go of their shyness.
- 41. #1M516** أمهاتنا خرجوا ضباط و دكاتره جامعات وأطباء ومهندسين لم يُحسوا بنقص لأن أولادهم أولياء أمورهم الناقصه هي من تحس بهذا Our mothers have raised officers and university professors and doctors and engineers and did not feel lacking because their sons were their guardians the lacking is the one who feels that way

The representation of women as a 'burden' was related to the 'topos of problem' and the 'topos of urgency' in #2. By grouping oneself with the addressees with 'we', this male tweep draws on such hyperbolic descriptions of *9anis*-hood to magnify the problem and merit immediate action [42]. Autonomisation, i.e. an emphasis on 'sameness' and 'national singularity' is the counterpart of heteronomisation (loss of national uniqueness through external forces) (Wodak et al., 2009:141). It was used here to unify the people and the State as a single front against corruption resulting from *9anis*-hood. This unification was underscored with the phrase 'like a family' to invite policymakers to solve the problem of delayed marriage [43]. The bracketed number '(2)' shows that this comment was one of several comments that aimed to discuss the problem and then its solutions, amongst which was polygamy.

42. #2M80 Delay of marriage causes many of the problems that started to surface lately..we have to save what we can save before everything is lost!
43. #2M566 The state is like the family and it has to contribute to establishing mechanisms to facilitate and accomplish delayed and slow marriage procedures (2)


These arguments designated *9anis*-hood as a social problem and related it to the topos of ‘catastrophe’ to suggest the interference of the government to provide financial support ‘of course’ to men who wish to marry [44]. Such rhetoric was continued when combined with war-based metaphors such as ‘army of *9anises*’ with ‘dangerous consequences and bitter results’ to legitimate polygamy [45].

44. #2M661 A social catastrophe and the interference of the government is necessary by establishing offices in the principality of the provinces for marriage with financial support of course
45. #2M809 For this army of *9anises* there are dangerous consequences and bitter results that will make the society suffer under the influence of psychological pressures and social pains



Besides the problematisation of *9anis*-hood, another strategic move found among the conservative party in #2 was the naturalisation of *9anis*-hood with the topos of ‘consequence’ of the traditions of marriage being criticised to prepare the grounds for later legitimisation of polygamy. It was suggested as the ‘natural’ result of the debilitating demands of traditional marriages or unemployment [46] or as the consequence of romanticised media influence, which was emphasised here through the shift to Roman letters for the name of the channel [47].

46. #2M561 An astronomical dowry and a night like a thousand night and a luxurious house and a maid .. etc. and the young men are suffering unemployment ..I think it is natural that we reach this result!
47. #2M726 شي طبيعي ان تكون عانس لان ثقافتهم وانفتاح الشباب على MBC مسلسلات خيالات رومنسيه بس بعد ٧ سنوات بنصحى Something natural that she would be *9anis* because their culture is based on MBC series and the exposure of the youth to the romantic fictions but after 7 years we’ll wake up












































Among the linguistic tools that conservatives employed to explain *9anis*-hood rationally was the use of the superlative adjective for hyperbolic expressions, e.g. ‘strongest’ to evaluate ‘high dowries’ as the prime cause of *9anis*-hood [48]. High dowries and other financial burdens imposed on men for marriages were said to go against the Prophet’s teachings recommending reasonable dowries for the marital union to be blessed, a blessing that was visualised with the couple’s emoji [49].

48. #2M244 And high dowries are the strongest cause of 9anis-hood
49. #2M400 The lowest the dowries the most blessed [an unmarked excerpt from a Prophetic *Hadith*] 

In #2, male tweeps were intensifying feelings of frustration while recounting the financial expectations imposed on them in marriage with the help of emojis. Mainly to delegitimize high dowries and express disapproval of the current condition of high dowries, a situation suffered by Saudi men, a heart-break emoji was called for, accompanied by the evaluative hashtag ‘#ABitterReality’ [50] and the evaluative thumbs-down emoji [51].

50. #2M642 How would it not increase [the percentage of 9anises] and her family ask for a dowry that would have provided the livelihood of an African tribe for a year ! #ABitterReality
51. #2M514 Dowries are the cause 

The inclusion of the Arabic-speaking and Saudi-owned MBC channel in Roman letters highlighted its role in propagating romanticised or Westernised conceptualisations of marriage in the minds of the youth. It was depicted as the source of fantasies that have resulted in high expectations that differs from what has been traditionally endorsed in marriage [47 above]. This was intensified by the metaphor in ‘زرعته’ /zara9athuw/ (planted/ingrained) and the repetition of the heart emoji [52].

52. #2M864 السبب ما زرعه قنوات MBC في عقول الشباب والشابات من افكار عن الزواج والحب وفارس الاحلام                       The cause is the ideas that MBC channels have planted [ingrained] in the minds of young men and women about love and marriage and prince charming                     

Such opinions about high dowries were negated based on ‘undocumented’ numbers of women outnumbering men in the country which helped legitimate polygamy [53]. The claim was also contradicted by redirecting the argument about 9anis-hood to other money-related national conditions of poverty and unemployment [54].

53. #2M636 No high dowries or anything, the main cause of #2 is the increase of their [women’s] numbers in comparison to men that’s why there is no solution but with polygamy
54. #2M556 Not true because of high dowries say the truth this is because of poverty and unemployment in Saudi [the country] despite the bountifulness of oil

To further legitimate polygamy, which perpetuates a ‘women as domestic’ discourse, intertextuality was employed by quoting a decontextualised verse from the Qur’an while suggesting that monogamy is for the coward men [55]. After hashtagging ‘a decision you

wish for' to announce his suggested solution for *9anis*-hood, repetition was another device used by this male tweep to advance the same rhetoric about polygamy as the solution [56].

55. #2M622 The solution is in applying the basic principle which is polygamy.

As for marrying one woman is for the incompetents and the cowards, my God says: [Marry women of your choice ...] the verse

56. #2M139 #ADecisionYouWishFor support for polygamy polygamy polygamy polygamy

For a combined effect of negative-other representation and sarcasm in the process of legitimating polygamy, a machine-related phrase was borrowed from English, i.e. 'full-option', and a religious discourse was indexed in the word '*Sunnah*', to mock fantasy-based male matches that women are stereotyped to be looking for [57]. These choices indicate that women were seen as influenced by Western ways of thinking, which also implicitly relates to the circulating discourse about their 'irrationality' and 'vulnerability'. The second phrase which encourages women to accept being second or third or fourth wives helps with the interpretation of 'full-option' to be understood as a 'single/unmarried' man.

57. #2M688 لانستغرب لأن أكثرنا عطل سنة التعدد ولأن البنات يرغبن رجلا full- option، يجب أن ترضى المرأة أن تكون ثانية وثالثة ورابعة We don't think the percentage is strange because we have not applied the *Sunnah* [Prophet's way] of the Prophet, which is multiple marriages and because girls want full-option men. Women have to accept to be second, third, or fourth wives.

Hence, polygamy was suggested as the solution for *9anis*-hood based on Islamic teachings whereby women (and their guardians) were encouraged to lower financial expectations and accept polygamy [58]. The use of 'our religion' twice and 'we' was intended to establish religious unity and solidarity against the problem. Underlying these arguments is a blame-shifting process to make women and their guardians' demands the cause of *9anis*-hood, which suggests their superficiality and irrationality. Such arguments were sometimes supported by juxtaposing these requirements with a Prophetic *Hadith* [59]. In these examples, MSA was the linguistic variety selected to give authority to the arguments, emulating religious discourse, for legitimating polygamy.

58. #2M703 The solution is in our religion: - encouraging men to get married quickly. - lowering dowries. - polygamy. Our religion is great so could we apply its teachings.

59. #2M293 : The prophet used to say if a man whose religion and moral conduct are pleasing to you proposes to you, then let him marry but in reality (everyone [girl] has her demands) and this is the biggest cause of 9anis-hood after high dowries of course

Polygamy was further legitimated by drawing on a religious discourse while disapproving of women's rejection of it and men's abandonment of it as a responsibility, employing emojis to intensify these evaluations [60]. 'Topos of comparison' and 'topos of time' between our fathers' time, when there were 'zero' spinsters, and ours, past and present, were employed to promote polygamy [61]. For the same purpose, polygamy was also 'sugarcoated' assertively as 'delicious and pleasurable' to encourage men to 'protect the chastity' of women [62], projecting a discourse about marriage as 'cover' for women who are privatised to the domestic sphere. Or, marrying four women was presented with war-related metaphors of chivalry and courage [63].

60. #2M818 The solution is in going back to shariah [will of God, i.e. polygamy] 🙄 but with its conditions applied,, women do not accept it ✗ and men are not responsible enough 🙄

61. #2M202 Polygamy is the solution during the days of our fathers and grandfathers 9anis-hood was zero even the divorced and widowed woman once her waiting time is finish you find her suitors at the door

62. #2M611 I swear by God polygamy in addition to fighting 9anis-hood it is very delicious and pleasurable, and your God gives help to be fair, hey men be courageous and try and protect the chastity of others

63. #2M583 Whoever marries 4 is considered a national hero, and should be honoured with the old warriors

Based on the last example, not only was polygamy offered as a solution for the pandemic 'problem' of high rates of 9anises, but it was also considered a religious and patriotic duty to 'guard' the chastity of women, described again with a war-related metaphor, e.g. 'to defeat 9anis-hood' [64]. Employing the hyperboles of 'every man' represented as 'a soldier fighting 9anis-hood' and every woman as guarding 'an open port' [65] to encourage men and women to embrace polygamy. Polygamy was further depicted as a 'patriotic' obligation followed by an analogy with predators and preys, yet another polarising metaphor similar to the boys-as-wolves representation [66]. This is supported by the guardianship system in a male-dominated community since women are assumed to need men for financial support in addition to legal representation. Notice the deployment of the hashtag '#Saudi' in the last two examples to contextualise the comments and make them relevant only to the Saudis.



64. #2M608 I suggest for the man to defeat 9anis-hood that he marries 3 virgins a divorced and a widowed woman, so he can fulfil his national duty and we become a nation without 9anises with its men as its commandos.
65. #2M618 Every man no matter what his age or fortune in #Saudi ought to be a soldier and fight 9anis-hood and every woman is on an open port [a vulnerable location during wartime] should accept a married man and the 9anis-hood rates will go down
66. #2M653 Hey blessed young men of #Saudi: the national duty is calling from the heart of every 9anis, marry multiple wives may God bless you do not leave them preys to every vulgar person, marry the four

### 6.2.3 Dismantling calls for change

Conservative tweeps engaged in dismantling the arguments of their progressive opponents mainly through making negative associations and negative-other presentation to discredit them and delegitimize their ideas with the aid of intensification and mitigation strategies. The strategies of silencing, intensification, and mitigation were often fulfilled by contextualisation cues of various forms, including emojis, punctuation marks, hyperbolic metaphors, shifts from the commonly-used Dialectal Arabic (DA) to use MSA, which is more formal, shifts to English script, and repetition. Critical comments directed at policymakers to dismantle any change in the situation of women and rationalisations were made to legitimate requests for a change in the situation of men were mitigated with such predicational strategies as nominalisation and passivation.

Although a polarisation that resembles what was presented in Section 6.2.1.2, the polarisation here of the opposing ideological group was not meant to perpetuate traditional social constructions. Rather, it was constructed to undermine the arguments of pro-change supporters and the progressive ideas they spread in the hashtags. To discredit progressive groups, conservatives associated them with a group that is nationally vilified, i.e. liberals, in relation to an activity, here the advocacy of women's liberties. Through this meso-strategy of association, supporters of women's rights and pro-change contributors were linked to liberalist/foreign agendas to disparage them and delegitimize their arguments. This strategy relies on the shared presupposition indoctrinated by religious figures of the *Sahwa* movement that women, due to their emotional nature, are targeted by the West to uproot the social values that Muslim families uphold. Thus, there was finger-pointing practised against the liberals and the women. It was also realised through negative-other presentation using derogation, special metaphors and collocations

that invoke negative prosody, and argumentation schemes deriving on the topos of danger, in addition to an association with heteronomisation, i.e. loss of national uniqueness through external forces (Wodak et al., 2009), which was considered a threat to the autonomy/singularity of the country and its religious values. In doing so, the examples show that ‘double-voiced discourse’ was adopted as tweets oriented to the views of their opponents or spoke about their views on their behalf.

In combination with a meta-discourse to contextualise the targeted group, the following conservatives felt motivated to confront their opponents in defence of the status quo by calling them ‘liberals’ and collocating it with the pejorative term ‘herd’ whose ‘appetite’ was metaphorically stimulated [67]. After a normative statement supported by a religious discourse about ‘good’ women, liberals were further associated with unacceptable practices in the social context, i.e. accused of wanting to ‘uncover women’. This was apparent in the euphemism of ‘the way she was created’ to mean ‘naked’ [68].

- 67. #1M418 A hashtag that stimulated the appetite of the liberal herd
- 68. #1F504 Whoever follows the controls of Qur’an and Sunnah [Prophetic traditions] .. she does not need to be reminded by the profanity of the liberal who does not rest until he sees her the way she was created by God

This association warranted negatively describing liberal men who often participate in women-related hashtags as hypocrites and animalising them as ‘sheep’ [69]. The imperative statement addressed to the liberal questions his motivation, namely a wish to ‘win’ over liberal or oppressed women, who are being polarised here.

- 69. #1F22 Dear crazy sheep (who is taken lightly) come here and tweet a few words in which you forsake your principles—and you will get retweeted by the liberal and the oppressed women 🖐️

Negative-other presentation of opponents in #2 was done by associating the constant focus on women’s issues with suspicious agendas of ‘liberals’ [70] who are ‘killing us’ with the driving issue. Their derogation was sometimes mitigated by the ambiguous pronoun ‘they’ and the definition of liberalism as ‘foreign ideas’, which are dysfunctional because they ‘fight against’ early marriages but ‘complain’ of *9anis*-hood [71]. Such arguments continue the rhetoric depicting women as the target of foreign agendas.

- 70. #2M335 The liberals are killing us with women’s driving and leaving all the real problems from which the poor thing is suffering behind!
- 71. #2M444 They fight against early marriages for those whom were equipped to by God, and they complain when the marriage of the girl or the young man was delayed, the dysfunction is in the foreign ideas!

For negative-other presentation, sarcasm marked by emoji was employed to derogate advocates of women's rights in conservative discourses. They were disparaged for their interest and participation in women's issues, which reiterates the rhetoric of segregation of the sexes even online and presupposes a gender-difference discourse. Their masculinity was questioned by suggesting they wear women's clothes and were then dismissed and shamed [72]. It was also negated based on descriptions of forms that reveal the new generation's adoption of Western life styles [73].

72. #1F773 To whoever has left sitting in male assemblies to join a women's hashtag don't you wish to wear an *abaya* [traditional black dress for women] and put polish 😊 You should be ashamed of yourself and let me not see you here
73. #2F827 Because there are no longer Saudis who are men they're out of stock they wear low waist [pants] put on bracelets and post videos on Instagram while they're cutting a cake and on snap 😊 I just ask God for forgiveness

Not only men, but women with liberal ideas were disparaged too. The derogation was intensified by an imperative statement directed at *9anises* to consult with the advocates of liberty, who have ruined their lives, to help them get married, because they cannot [74]. The remark was understood as sarcastic because of the added emoji as a contextualisation cue. In a few instances, a liberal would be nominated to stand for the group of Saudi women's rights' activists on Twitter who are held responsible for women's problems, e.g. 'R\*\*\*\*\* AI\*\*\*\*\*' [75].

74. #2M122 Go to the advocates of the liberation of women and let them get you married 🤔 [because they have deceived you]
75. #2M164 And the reason is R\*\*\*\*\* AI\*\*\*\*\* [a famous women's rights activist on twitter, name masked for anonymity] fooled them

This ideology-based negative-other presentation was evident in #2 through collocating the evaluative hashtags '#TheLiberals', '#LiberalMules', and '#LibroFascist' because they, the user claimed on their behalf, objectify 'the woman' as 'a hatching machine' and a tool for pleasure [76]. However, this claim contradicts the fact that it is the conservatives who were being flirtatious, objectifying, and promoting of polygamy. Additionally, the liberals were said to be exploiting women as the repetition of the word 'woman' simulated their focus on women's issues [77].

76. #2M253 #TheLiberals consider the woman a hatching machine and a tool for entertainment, ecstasy, and sex #LiberalMules #Librofascist

77. #2M285 The #liberal project starts with the woman and ends with the woman and passes by the woman and all of that with the purpose of derogating her dignity and for that reason #2

This strategy is also relevant whenever the Islamic religion and character were emphasised in combination with the topos of ‘threat’ in relation to a different set of shared ideas about ‘evil’ foreign influence and Western conspiracy [78]. Such topoi of threat and danger warranted a unity to defend current social values against international heteronomy (loss of national character) and implicated that there is a national/religious sense of superiority. The word ‘you want to free the woman’ presupposes an imprisonment of women intended meant to be kept a national/private matter. Threat was combined with the topoi of comparison and history to refer to the practices of the Prophet’s wives and derogate the ‘advocates of Westernisation’ using MSA variety of Arabic to formally designate Saudi women as both holders of the country’s religious values who can not be conquered by foreign agendas [79].

78. #1F766 Honestly who declared this decision is evil the situations are not comforting and there are wars and you want to free the woman to travel look we do not want anything living in peace is enough for us

79. #1M496 يسعها ما وسع أمهات المؤمنين اللاتي لم يخرجن إلا بمحرم ومتحجيات المراه السعودية قهرت دعة التغريب What applies to her was applied to the mothers of all Muslims [the Prophet’s wives] who did not go out without a maHram [male guardian] and well covered the Saudi woman has overcome advocates of westernisation

As some of the previous examples may have revealed already, the strategy of intensification was a resource drawn upon by some conservative tweeps to aid the delegitimation and mitigation of critical comments. To polarise advocates of change on hashtags, emojis served to intensify dismissive comments to silence them in #1. The hand jab emoji [80] and a stop hand gesture emoji [81] served to strengthen the effect of a command invoking the name of the deity to ‘shut up’ and a denial of the possibility of allowing women to travel alone ‘you will not go out’ respectively. These comments were intended to close the subject of masculine travel controls over women, which suggests that they believed it is an inappropriate topic for deliberation online. A rhetorical question served the same purpose of silencing while negatively evaluating advocates of women’s liberation as hypocrites, intensified by the profane dismissive suggestion to ‘eat shit and shut up’, because they are believed to preach what they do not do [82]. The repeated question marks and the ellipsis employed to address a group of opposing hashtag

contributors for euphemistic reasons, served to assert and generalise the travel controls to all Muslim women, whatever their nationality, by linking the issue to a religious discourse [83].

80. #1F785 Shut up for God's sakes 🖐️
81. #1M561 You will not go out 🖐️
82. #1M434 Question? Do you accept that your sister travels alone? Then eat shit and shut up
83. #1F902 What controls??? Hey ..... The controls of the woman's travel Saudi Emarati Spanish Italian .....etc. were assigned in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* [Prophetic traditions]

To further intensify existing ideological conflicts, meta-commentaries about them represented debates about women's issues metaphorically as spaces where the 'war' between the conservatives and the liberals persist online, embodying the wider division in the Saudi society [84].

84. #1F688 And the cold war continues!, controlling the enemies of the nation is more important...

Intensification with hyperboles may utilise special metaphors to enhance meanings (van Dijk, 2006). Such metaphors were evident in conservative discourses in #1 to help caution against a 'foreign conspiracy' by means of representing the SEDAW agreements (The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) as 'profane', intensifying what it does to society with the repeated expression 'gnawing at' the social fabric of the country and its moral values [85].

85. #1M483 It seems that the profanities of the evil #SEDAW agreement are going on in gnawing at the fabric of our society and gnawing at its morals and religion and constants #Saudi

To express opposition to change and yet mitigate the critical remarks that conservatives directed at policymakers, the predicational strategies of served nominalisation and passivations that purpose. Examples of nominalisations include 'بدأ ارتخاء العنان' /bada?a irtixa:? Al9ana:n/ (relaxing the leashes has started) [86] or accusing it of neglecting the phenomenon of unemployment 'تعطينا يتناسب طردياً مع العنوسة' /ta9Tiylana yatana:sab Tardiyian ma9a al9unuwsah/ (our unemployment is directly related to the proportion of 9anis-hood), example [237] in Chapter 5. Other nominalisations, such as 'معالجة البطالة' /mu9a:lajat albaTa:lah/ (tackling unemployment), example [183] in Chapter 5, and 'قضايا جديرة بالدراسة' /qaDa:ya: jadiyah bildira:sah/ (issues worth studying), appear to have been deployed in #2 to downgrade the significance of

9anis-hood or men's abstinence from marriage and divert attention to their financial conditions to encourage solutions for them.

86. #1M666 بدأ ارتخاء العنان لتتطلق الفرس للحرية التي يسعون لها The reins are starting to loosen up so that the mare bolts out to the freedom that they [liberals] are seeking

These critiques formed the basis to express expectations of interference from policymakers with expressions like 'المفروض' /almafruWD/ (should be/ supposed to be) to impose 'what is right', which was very common in the previous examples in this chapter. Passives were also employed, e.g. 'يجب' /yajib/ (there ought to be), e.g. example [44] above from #2 and 'تُرك' /turika:/ (is left to). In [87] below from #1, intensification with the hyperbolic 'topos of danger' implicated in the expressions 'we can kiss [a good] life good bye' and 'we've lost her forever', was combined with the mitigated address to policymakers to criticise any desire on their part to allow women free mobility, i.e. 'when the woman is left to travel' without supervision.

87. #1F468 متى تُرك المجال للمرأة بالسفر والتنقل بلا محرم وبلا شروط ولا قيود فعلى الدنيا السلام وقد فقدناها وخسرناها للأبد When the woman is left to travel and commute without a maHram and without any controls or conditions we can kiss life good bye and we've lost her forever

Another form of passivation is nominalisation, which was deployed to be critical of the government seeking its support for the tweep's conservative stance to prevent women from travelling in #1, e.g. 'ابتعاتها' /ibti9a:Θaha:/ (sending her on a scholarship abroad), and 'منعها' /man9aha:/ (stop her), example [88] below, or to support men financially to be able to tie the knot, once or more, e.g. 'تقديم 100 الف' /taqdiym 100 ?alf/ (offering 100 thousand [Riyals to support polygamous men]), example [23] previous chapter, and 'وضع' /waD9/ (establishing), e.g. examples [43 and 44] from #2, found in this chapter.

88. #1M612 ماذا تريد المراه السعوديه من الخارج وحدها !! حتى ابتعاتها لتعليهم يكون تخصصها سخيـف وفاشل ف الافضل منعها What does the Saudi woman want from abroad alone!! Even when sent for a study-abroad scholarship her specialisation is silly and a disappointment so it is better she is stopped

### 6.3 Discursive strategies for pro-change contributors

Pro-change or progressive contributors draw on two main macro-strategies of dismantling to undermine socially-established gendered constructions and transformation

to endorse social change through revealing discontinuities and inconsistencies in the patriarchal system and social structure that unjustly cause women to suffer or humour. While progressives were keen on constructing transformed images of Saudi women, they were obliged to draw on the same patriarchal discourses, stereotypes, and constructions of gender relations to persuasively communicate with their opponents. Table 21 summarises these strategies.

*Table 21: A summary of the discursive strategies employed by pro-change tweeps*

<b>Macro-strategies</b>	<b>Meso-strategies</b>	<b>Means of realisation</b>
6.3.1. Dismantling existing social constructions	6.3.1.1. Social-actor representation (referential and predicational strategies)	-relational identification, -functionalisation, -negative-other presentation, -collectivisation, -abstraction, -nomination, -inversion, -emphasis on similarity (autonomy to show empathy), -juxtaposition, -objectifying analogies, -animalising analogies, -and appraisements
	6.3.2.2. Delegitimizing the status quo	
	○ <b>Delegitimizing gendered stereotypes</b>	-re-appropriating animalising/objectifying stereotypes -hyperbole -topos of comparison, -juxtaposition, -metaphor, -analogy -meta-commentary -hypothetical scenarios (may be visually projected using emojis), -metaphorical aphorism -irony
	○ <b>Delegitimizing discriminatory social practices</b>	-discrediting opponents by association, US and THEM polarisation, and disparaging evaluations, -delegitimizing arguments by ‘topos of history or ‘topos of comparison’, and juxtaposition.

		<p>-hyperbolic or spatial metaphors, hyperbolic mock suggestions,          -emotional release (using emojis or hyperboles, negation, or negative-other presentation),          -‘small story’ as illustrative example          -direct criticism (intensified by hyperboles, shifts to the formal MSA variety of Arabic)          -indirect criticism (i.e. mitigated by vague references, irony, passivation, or nominalisation)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Delegitimizing differentiation of Saudi women/SA</b></li> </ul>	<p>-expressing weariness with it through repetition, swearwords, hashtag-related metacommentary, negative evaluation          -hyperbolic metaphor          -Questions          -Shifts to MSA variety          -assimilation with generalisations and emphasis on national autonomy          -mockery of State singularity          -and topos of a ‘terrible place’</p>
6.3.2. Transforming the status quo	6.3.2.1. Humouring social incongruities	<p>-Laughter, with(out) emojis,          -sarcasm, with(out) emojis,          -aphorisms and inversion of aphorisms or fixed expressions,          -hyperbolic mock suggestions (using hashtags),          -and parodies</p>
	6.3.2.2. Emphasis on discontinuities	<p>-argumentation schemes (topoi) (e.g. comparison, time, change, progress, consequence, sugar-coated world’,          -juxtaposition of positive/negative presentation,          -rhetorical questions,          -negation then exception          -mock suggestions,</p>



		-re-appropriating established metaphors, -emphasis on what needs to be discontinued and emphasis on the need for change for the autonomy of the country
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### 6.3.1 Dismantling existing social constructions

The macro-strategy of dismantling was employed by progressive tweeps mainly to undermine the masculine authority or cultural received ways of thinking that are dressed in religious doctrine. However, many of the patriarchal stereotypes and constructions of women were also found in the progressive discourses, brought into discussion to negate or deride them. Paradoxically, it needs to be acknowledged that whether they were invoked for justification of their existence by conservatives or for disruption and transformation by the progressives, the traditional social constructions are being perpetuated.

#### 6.3.1.1 *Social-actor representation*

Studying the representation of social actors in the tweets produced by the progressives, the following representations were identified that differed from those constructed by anti-change tweeps. The referential strategies adopted by the progressive tweeps of the six social actors represented in the data revealed that variation and what social roles, stereotypes, or polarisations were taken up or negated.

There were functionalised references to governmental institutions and personnel such as ‘police’, ‘religious police’, ‘#Passports’, ‘*sheikh*’, ‘judge’, ‘court’, ‘ministry’, and ‘rules’, ‘decision(s)’, or ‘systems’ in #1 and ‘#MinistryOfCivilService’ and ‘the survey/statistics’ in #2. Most of these references were made to express a negative stance towards the status quo and criticise the newly-proposed controls in #1 or to express a desire for change, in this case a change that supports men financially so that they could eradicate ‘*9anis*-hood’, c.f. legitimation, examples 49-50. Such a perception of change has blurred the divide between conservative/progressive stances. Some references to decision makers contained critical evaluative terms, such as ‘the Kingdom of males and enslaved women’, ‘the backward racist Kingdom of males’ or ‘the country of males’, e.g. Chapter 5 [34]. As representatives of the State, explicit idiosyncratic references to ‘the House of Al-Saud’, ‘princes’ or ‘their highnesses’, but mainly for questioning the

application of the rules established by them on members of their family, e.g. Chapter 5 [54]. This will be further explored as part of the delegitimation strategy of the discriminatory practices against women in Section 0.

The religious scholars who have legitimated institutionalised social practices based on strict or male-dominated interpretations of canonical texts were negatively represented or dismissed as misogynist or biased, e.g. ‘قاضي’ /qaDiy/ (judge), ‘شيخ’ /šayx/ (*sheikh*, religious or tribal authority). Conservatives who joined the discussions to defend the status quo were represented in progressive discourses and criticised as ‘متشددین’ /mutašaddidiyn/ (Islamic extremists) or ‘داعشي’ /da:9išiy/ (*Daesh*) as several previous instances illustrated and will be further highlighted as part of the strategy of association to discredit them for the delegitimation of their arguments. This is a strategy of genericisation where they were grouped with the authority given to society, its culture, its people, or their adopted version of religion. Such social authorities were represented in the samples broadly as ‘المجتمع’ /almujtama9/ (the society) or adjectives related to it, ‘الناس’ /alna:s/ or ‘الشعب’ /alša9b/ (the people), and ‘الجماعة’ /aljama:9ah/ (the community), along references to ‘ثقافة’ /Θaqa:fah/ (culture), ‘عادات’ /9a:da:t/ (habits) and ‘تقاليد’ /taqaliyd/ (traditions), which were described as ‘dated’.

With a strategy of assimilation, conservative social authorities and their supporters were derogated as ‘جيل الصحوه’ (/jiyl alSaHwah/ (the generation of the awakening) or a playful inversion of it as ‘جيل الغفوة’ /jiyl alGafwah/ (the generation of slumber), c.f. Chapter 5 [176]. Their ideology was invoked as ‘فكر (ديني)’ /fikr (diyini)/ ((religious) thought). It involves functionalisations based on ideological stance to negatively categorise them as opponents, e.g. as ‘مطاوعة’ /maTaw9ah/ (*muttawas*, strict religious figures), ‘قوم #أختاه موتي’ /qawm #uxta:h muwtiy/ (#SisterDie) (The people who wish women would vanish), ‘مستشيخين’ /mustašyixiy/ (a derogative form of *sheikh*, pretending to be one), ‘عنصريين’ /9unSuriyiyn/ (racists), ‘إرهابيين’ /?raha:biyiyn/ (terrorists) and ‘مستشرفين’ /mustašrifiy/ (hypocrites). There were a number of references and calls for polygamy with ‘أدعاء التعدد الشهبانيين’ /?d9iya:? alta9addud alšahawa:niyiyn/ (lustful advocates of polygamy). These negative-other representations are meant to dismantle the authority of those people and their male-biased interpretations that discriminate against women. Defendant contributors of dominant ‘conservative’ values are referred to in this thesis as the ‘anti-change group’.

In addition to the metonymical use of some representations of women as ‘Saudi women’, ‘queen’, which were subverted by the progressives, women were included and classified as social actors in progressive discourses that derives on education, e.g. ‘المرأة المتعلمة’ /almarʔah almuta9allimah/ (the educated woman), or patriotic affiliation, when women were calling for their rights based on a representation of themselves as ‘مواطنات’ /muwa:Tina:t/ (citizens) or objecting to being treated as ‘مواطنات من الدرجة الثانية’ /muwa:tina:t mina aldarajah alṪaniyah/ (second-class citizens). Here, these constructions combine to stress the need for a complementary relationship between men and women to strengthen the country’s social structure.

The inherent freedom given to a human being from birth was asserted before pinpointing that male dominance and the present exercise of power and hegemony over women is the result of traditions that are legitimated by religious commandments [89]. Thus, men in the samples were supporting women and problematising the influence of cultural habits and the constant singularisation of women with religious injunctions to criticise the religious school for the institutionalised constraints imposed on them in #1 [90].

89. #1M354 Man is born free whether man or woman none of them owns the right to cancel the other’s right the problem of this country is mixing obsolete traditions with religion
90. #1M274 This problem of the religious school here is that they do not offer solutions and insist on making it worse with their extreme obstinateness with their unfair systems

Additionally, functionalisation through occupation was mainly relied on to serve progressive discourses, e.g. ‘طبيبة’ /Tabiybah/ (physician), ‘معلمات’ /mu9allima:t/ (teachers), ‘مبتعثة’ /mubta9aṪah/ (a study-abroad student). Other positive other-representation based on their behaviour or ideological stance include ‘المرأة العصرية’ /almarʔah al9aSriyyah/ (the modern woman), but there were also negative classifications such as ‘إرهابية’ /ʔirha:biyyah/ (terrorist) and ‘داعشية’ /da:9iʃiyyah/ (*Daeshi* [woman]). Evaluative and abstract appraisements were more frequent in negative than positive terms. Examples of positive evaluations include ‘السيدات المستقلات’ /alsaiyyda:t almustaqilla:t/ (the independent women), ‘المرأة المثالية’ /imraʔah miṪa:liyyah/ (a perfect woman), and ‘الجزء المهم من الوطن’ /aljuzʔ Almuhimm fiy albalad/ (the important part of the nation). Negative evaluations of women were numerous, mostly self-inflected self-images intended to vent feelings of victimisation to criticise the status quo, e.g. the victimym ‘ضحية’ /DaHiyyah/ (victim), ‘عبء’ /9ibʔ/ (burden), ‘سجينة أنظمة’ /sajjīnat

anDimah/ (a prisoner of the systems), and 'لا يراها إلا كائن جنسي بحت' /la: yaraha: ?illa ka: ?in jinskiy baHt/ (he does not see her but as purely sexual being).

Some of these depictions were abstracting or impersonalising (-human feature) retaining a generic character similar to or in conjunction with other generic forms such as 'حالات' /Hala:t/ (cases), 'هالفئة' /halfi?ah/ (this fraction), 'فلانة' /fula:nah/ (that person), 'انسانة' /insa:nah/ (a human being), 'كائن' /ka: ?in/ (a creature), or 'واحدة' /waHdah/ (one, i.e. woman). Objectification through comparison to objects is present in representation of Saudi women while negating traditional, sometimes religiously indoctrinated, definitions of them, e.g. 'حطبات جهنم' /HaTaba:t Jahannam/ (the wood of Hell), and 'مجرد آلة' /mujarrad ?a:lah/ (merely a machine), not to forget to mention the previously-discussed 'lacking in mind', 'irrational', and 'fitnah' categorisations which distil and generalise a socially-imposed feature on women. These derogative terms were mostly invoked in progressive discourses to describe - and criticise - the status quo.

In progressive discourses, representing men by their biological sex for essentialisation was intended for derogation, e.g. 'الذكر السعودي' /al?akar alsu9uwdiy/ (the Saudi male) or 'ذكر' /?akar/ (male). Other forms of essentialisation include 'رجل' /rajul/ (man) and the plural forms 'الرجاليل' /raja:jiyl/ (colloquial for 'men'), 'الذكور' /al?ukuwr/ (the males), and 'ذكوركم' /?ukuwrukum/ (your males). Here, a distinction was made between 'men', 'males', 'ربع رجال' /rub9 rijja:l/ (a quarter of a man), and 'أشباه الرجال' /?šba:h alrija:l/ (semi-men) where only 'men' has positive connotations and impersonalising descriptions with a generic character such as 'كائن ذكوري' /ka: ?in šukuwriy/ (a masculine creature). The marital statuses of men as 'متزوج' /mutazawwij/ (the married one) and 'العانس' /al9a:nis/ (the 9anis man) were emphasised by progressives in the dismissal of polygamous men and redefinitions of the term '9anis' respectively. The age-based physical identification of 'مراهق' /mura:hiq/ (a teenager) and the dismissive term 'عيال' /9iya:l/ (boys) or 'مراهق أبو 20' /mura:hiq ?abuw 20/ (a teenager who is at the age of 20) in progressive discourses as points of comparisons with older women to reveal the contradictions that help delegitimize the travel controls on women.

Evaluative and abstract appraisements were more frequent in negative than positive terms while expressing a progressive stance. Negative appraisements drawing on behaviour, however, were common in man-hating discourse, e.g. 'سرابيت' /sara:biyt/ (thugs), 'دشير' /dišiyir/ (deviant), 'ظالم' /?a:lim/ (oppressive), 'جاهل' /ja:hil/ (ignorant), 'سجان' /sajja:n/ (jailer), 'سفيه' /safiyh/ (ribald), and 'ناقص عقله' /na:qisun 9aqluh/ (lacking

in his mind) to parody the ‘lacking in mind’ discourse aimed at women. Animalisation, e.g. ‘ذئب’ /ðiʔa:b/ (wolves) and ‘الضببان’ /alDibba:n/ (desert reptiles) and further objectification, e.g. ‘وادي من أودية جهنم’ /wa:diy min ʔwdiyat Jahannam/ (one of the valleys of Hell) or ‘الشنبات’ /alšanaba:t/ (the moustaches), were also employed.

Emojis of evaluative judgements or disapproval were added in #1 to intensify denunciations of the status quo of women [91] and criticising the singularisation of Saudi women by negative presentation of men and swearwords [92]. Female opponents of change were specifically negatively represented as ‘the disaster’ and ‘opponents to any calls for their rights’, reiterating the discourse about women being their own worst foes [93].

91. #1F398 May God help you Saudi [woman] everything is forbidden for you in your own country. And complications 🌊 [visual spitting]
92. #1F815 Why why the Saudi [woman] in particular !! qatiy’ah [an expression to hope someone would cease to be] .. God’s willing your passports get burned hey moustaches [men] all of you! Hah malat [an expression to wish bad luck for someone with the same hand gestures] 🙌👤
93. #1M944 The problem is not in the system or in the women.. but the disaster is that some women are so used to slavery that they have become opponents to any calls for their rights 🙌 ..

Negative-other presentation of men were occasionally intensified by ‘shoeing’ them off as incompetent for marriage [94], where their repetition appears to express the intensity of the feelings, as well as with representation of them in animal emojis [95]. These strategies were meant to downplay the significance of the issue.

94. #2F735 I swear and to be honest men are a source of depression and disgust and a miserable life ... rather tfoo [mimicking the sound of spitting] at you and you say *9anis* 😂😂😂😂😂😂💔👤👤
95. #2F402 Hahahahhaa I swear it is better for them [women] whoever thinks that marriage is fun you’re mistaken stay a 9anis at your family’s house better for you than men now are gathered zalayib [dependent as parasites] 🙌👤

While lexical ellipsis alone may be an indirect marker of criticism that can soften the negative impact of a swearword ‘don...’, its illocutionary force can be further mitigated with the addition of various mitigating smiling or shy emojis [96]. Without ellipsis, emojis were used to mitigate the negative-other presentation of men [97] or a flirtatious comment

by a male meant to deride the beauty of married women and positively describe spinsters as ‘beauties’ [98].

96. #2F449 From the end a moon [a beauty] in heaven rather than a don...[donkey] in this life 😊👤💔
97. #2F136 9anis-hood is better than your faces 🙄
98. #2M45 Because one-third of them are muzzaz [beauties] and the Prophet prayed for the ugly [ones] 🙄💜🙄

To disrupt gendered patterns based on biological sex, in addition to the mention of ‘F\*\*\*\*\*’ as an overdetermination/symbolisation of a young man with deviated behaviour [example 218, Chapter 5], celebrity names of men drawing on international media discourse were playfully mentioned in #2 to mock women’s husband goals and the underlying message was to disparage Saudi men, e.g. ‘براد بيت’ /bra:d pitt/ (Brad Pitt) and ‘جورج كلوني’ /juwrj kluwniy/ (George Clooney) [99].

99. #2F18 عشان جورج كلوني اتزوج وحدة عربية اصبرو ممكن براد بيت يغير رايه ههههههاي Because George Clooney married an Arabic girl you should wait probably Brad Pitt changes his mind hahahahaay

The negative other-presentation of ‘males’ was insinuated when comparing their behaviour abroad, assumed scandalous, to delegitimize the current travel controls because they apply only on women [100]. The whole social structure behind Male Dominance was casted as a ‘destruction of women’s character’ following several swearwords to denounce discriminating against women with the controls [101]. Therefore, there was too much negative other-representation happening in the samples than positive self-presentation on either side, except perhaps where males self-promoted for polygamy.

100. #1F792 The immoral men who are shaking their booties in Bahrain and Morocco and East Asia deserve these controls more if there is good in you you are only good at tightening things on the woman 😊
101. #1F185 Why are you messing up with us oh devils, trouble-makers, and immoral people you’re supposed to thank God for the blessing of our existence you’re a great threat and a destruction to [our] character.

In #2, irony was also used to mitigate criticism and ridicule male contributors to the hashtag who are showing compassion and empathy to women [102] or to juxtapose beauty and hatred in a phrase with the intention of derogating men, without the use of emoji [103].

102. #2M22 I don't know but those who write positive comments! Are these the same people we live with no one else 😊!! Of course I exclude flirting their intentions are noble [for the sake of God] 😊
103. #2F894 I swear it is because of the beauty of our males that we hated you [men]

The gendered 'social roles' were continuously re-negotiated to subvert them to expose that a power relation is at work and that men have more control over women's behaviour. Women were attributed more emotive and less cognitive or material actions and reactions in conservative discourses. Therefore, the gendered meanings of '9anis' and 'guardian' were obviously undergoing a semioticisation process as reinterpretation and redefinition were exchanged. Examples of those were previously discussed under meta-discourses about 'maHram' and '9anis', Section 5.3.1, and 'women-as-domestic' discourse, Section 5.2.1.3.

Regarding the guardianship rule, some tweeps questioned its validity and rejected being treated as minors, by association to children, or 'second-grade citizens' [104]. The 'transfer of her custody' to the religious authority in court, i.e. the *sheikh*/judge, with the new controls in cases of conflict or absence of a guardian was mocked with the phrase 'continues to move' [105]. Based on that, progressives call to break away from patriarchal ruling of women within and without their households, describing it as a 'strange' situation, to grant women more independence, and describe this order's origin as a manifestation of male-dominated ideology [106 & 107].

104. #1F816 The issue of wali amr and impeding women's affairs is a suffering that only the Saudi woman knows who does not have wasta! [unfair favouritism]
105. #1F332 And the woman continues to move from the custody of the guardian to that of the Sheikh [the judge].
106. #1M390 Why do most [official] procedures for the woman require wali amr [custodian]? Why don't you let her depend on herself without wali amr? Strange thing honestly.
107. #1M655 Not allowing the woman [women] to travel stems from a masculine-dominated society's view of the woman [women] which is surrounded with suspicion and that she is the source of fitnah [temptation] and vice

The labelling of women as '9anises' in #2 was demonstrated as limiting to women's social role by juxtaposing the two classifications of women as 'married' or '9anis' to criticise the way women's social role is defined based on their relation to men and questioning this privileging of men in women's lives [108]. While drawing on the 'topos of THIS time', 'في هالزمان' /fi halzama:n/ (in this time), the importance of marriage was

downgraded and that of ‘the degree and the job’ was asserted. Using negation, e.g. ‘not necessarily’ and ‘not called *9anises*’, the popular account of *9anis*-hood in terms of ‘destiny’ was rejected as a wide-blanket explanation to regain the agency of women and affirm that staying single is also a choice made [109]. The comment concluded with a swearword directed at a plural ‘you’, meaning the society. The statistics in the news were dismissed as ‘random’ with the command ‘relax [and leave]’ them alone [110]. *9anis*-hood was generalised and redefined to encompass ‘both genders at a certain age’ while it was argued a global phenomenon. While in these examples the discourse of ‘marriage is more important to women’ or ‘is the most important thing for women’ was undermined, in the last example the social perspective adopting it was described as ‘painful’ and a sign ‘of their ignorance’, also combined with a curse directed at ‘you’ [111].

- 108.** #2F468 One [of us] either gets married or is a *9anis* who is this man for her not to be complete without him in this time the degree and the job are more important than anything else.
- 109.** #2F133 Not necessarily because her destiny didn’t come? Maybe she does not want to get married so in both cases they are not called *9anises* may Allah tighten your lives on you
- 110.** #2M273 The *9anis* [word] is used with both genders at a certain age and not only for the woman for several reasons existing in all societies in the world so relax [and leave] those random statistics
- 111.** #2F359 The truth of the society’s view of the girl whose marriage has been delayed is painful! Because of their ignorance they think that the girl is thinking of marriage day and night! May God send you what overpowers you

The polarised roles ascribed to women were summarised as that of the ‘queen’ and the ‘slave’ to subvert the status quo [112] and *9anis*-hood was viewed as a consolidation of masculine hegemony that restricts her role to ‘marriage and reproduction’ [113].

- 112.** #1F211 The controls have changed but the situation is the same; the Saudi woman cannot be treated as a normal creature; she lives her roles between the queen and the slave.
- 113.** #2F892 And the Saudi woman is still subjected by the masculine society (to a race with time) by the name of *9anis*-hood in order to consolidate that her value is only in marriage and reproduction

This representation was often derided by associating it with the negative stereotype of ‘lacking in your mind’ to disrupt both while comparing her limited mobility to the unconditional mobility of a teenager [114]. The need to establish travel controls for men who have deformed the ‘image’ of the country and its people abroad was emphasised elsewhere [115].



114. #1M285 Imagine my dear queen you are lacking in your mind and you need consent whereas F\*\*\*\*\* [a young man known for socially-deviant behaviour, name masked for anonymity] is perfect ponder this O' the apple of my eye [this phrase is often used by religious orators when addressing women]
115. #1M634 Most of our problems abroad are caused by (males<<!) The controls are supposed to be applied on F\*\*\*\*\* and his fellows who have defamed the image of the country and the people with their barbarism 🤔
- Men, however, were given more active actions and reactions and less emotive attributes, also summarised in the following complaint where the effect is intensified by the repetition of the word 'male'. As such, their lower status on the hierarchy ladder in the Saudi society was affirmed [116].
116. #1F700 We were in situations where a male decides the type of *hijab* [head cover] a male prevents driving a male oppresses [others] in courts and we have become in a situation where a male allows traveling

#### 6.3.1.2 *Delegitimizing the status quo*

The progressives engaged with the strategy of delegitimation to contest the conservative's perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and social practices. These delegitimatory discursive practices deployed metaphors and narrative-based illustrations to highlight the consequences of male dominance, argumentation schemes such as the topos of burden, history, or comparison, and relied on revealing inconsistencies in the arguments of conservatives and in the way the system tackles women's issues.

Within the given examples, much intensification and mitigation were going on. For dismantling received ways of thinking, hyperboles were deployed, including hyperbolic mock suggestions and metaphors, emojis, and oath-assertions, which may have been exemplified elsewhere as they dispersed in other examples throughout the analysis chapters. Mitigation was realised using negation, emojis, irony, drawing on referential and predicational strategies, i.e. nominalisation and passivation, and vague pronouns were used while directing criticism.

#### The gendered stereotypes

The previously-mentioned gendered stereotypes that are found damaging to women and serve to perpetuate male dominance were foregrounded and contested by various strategies. To expose these underlying stereotypes, repulsive depictions of how the contested social practices represent women through the 'topos of comparison', metaphors

and analogies, meta-commentary, hypothetical scenarios displaying them (with/without emojis), re-appropriating metaphorical aphorisms, hyperboles, and ironies.

The use hyperbolic lexical choices that dehumanise or animalise women was the first of these strategies, drawing on analogies to ‘beasts’ or ‘camels’ [117 & 118]. These frequent comparisons to animals helped to strongly condemn the status quo [119]. A similar analogy was derived from a metaphor of animals that are ‘prone to extinction’ to answer a posed question about how women are treated in SA [120]. Such analogies were intended to expose, but exaggerate, the conservative assumption that women are ruled by their ‘instincts’. Hence, an awareness of the function of these cultural metaphors in legitimating the urge to control and domesticate women is apparent in this meta-discourse.

- 117.** #1M703            She has the right to travel why is she a beast we should engage!..  
**118.** #2M35            Because there are still people who want his daughter’s dowry as  
if he were selling a camel  
**119.** #1F317            Oh brother animals are not living like us may God curse it a  
country  
**120.** #1F207            How is the woman treated in SA? An animal prone to extinction  
that ought to be imprisoned and forced to reproduce!

Commodification of women in terms of trade (van Leeuwen, 2008) was another strategy exposed in critical comments of the status quo in #1 and the fact that it objectifies women was emphasised. Some tweeps showed awareness of this objectification. They highlighted that the very practice of labelling women as ‘*9anises*’ treats them as ‘commodities’ with ‘expiry dates’ in #2 through a simile [121]. The subordination of women under guardianship was subverted by the metaphor of women as mundane ‘personal’ possessions [122].

- 121.** #2M158            They do not stop depicting the #SaudiWoman as if she is a  
commodity whose expiry date finishes at a certain time  
**122.** #1F798            Because she is personal possessions she needs #1

The shared understanding of femaleness as lacking or irrational was challenged drawing on a ‘topos of comparison’. In #1, conservatives were mocked by comparing the free mobility women around the world enjoy and what the travel controls in SA say about Saudi women and about the conservatives themselves, i.e. their fear of women’s elopement [123]. The status of Saudi women ‘here’ was compared to that of other women in neighbouring countries to show that these controls draw a distorted image of Saudi women [124] and that of men who were accused of enacting behaviours that are culturally perceived as ‘deviated’ abroad [125]. Such propositions help to discursively disarm their





conservative opponents by rationalising the sentiments they perpetuate using religious doctrine and pointing to how discriminatory they are.

123. #1M404 Most of the women of the world travel freely! What are our women missing? Unless the oppositionist knows that he is uptight on his women, (and his women want to run away from him)
124. #1F396 Why aren't there controls for the woman in the societies around us as if the woman here does not understand anything and nothing can stop her neither religion nor manners
125. #1M249 I see travel controls for the Saudi man more important..because he brings us shame in every spot he drops in 😞.

Delegitimizing the arguments of opponents may also be carried out through hypothetical scenarios that depict religious figures and women a certain way. The new controls in #1 were mocked when some tweeps imagined similar situations in which a girl who wants to travel for leisure goes to court for consent and gets dismissed and treated as a minor by the judge [126 & 127]. These hypothetical situations argue by example that the newly-suggested controls do not mark any progress towards the liberation of women or granting them a dignified status.

126. #1M210 The girl: *Sheikh* I want to go to London to enjoy the colder weather.  
The judge: go to Abha [a city in the Southern region] travelling is not allowed
127. #1F182 I imagine the judge asking about the reason “tourism” and he says no stay Ramadan [the holy month of fasting] is close and you want to tour 😞!

A hypothetical situation at court based on the suggested travel controls was suggested to reiterate but dismantle conservative discourses that typify women with lack of control and rationality. Emojis were used to heighten the illocutionary force and make vivid such internalised constructions by replacing the lexical words ‘judge’ and the ‘woman who wants to travel’ with a ‘police man’ emoji, associated with the laughter emojis, and a ‘woman’ emoji combined with a ‘crying’ yellow face [128]. The use of emoji representations here may be considered a form of ellipsis motivated by pragmatic considerations like saving character space in a tweet, indirectness and playfulness, politeness, and intensification. A similar hypothetical dialogue was found in #2 where the age of *9anis*-hood to question the validity of the announced statistics of *9anises* and emphasise the ambiguity of the term and its man-serving deployment [129].

128. #1F417  : what is the cause of your travel?  our [female] neighbour travelled she's not better than me   : ok ok we accept 😂😂 a

word of truth you girls of my life you couldn't be controlled here let alone abroad

129. #2F823 Excuse me how old are you? 27 oh 9anis 😊 ^yes yes the study appears to have been carried out about this age and even half of them [the people who did the study] consider a 25 year old woman a 9anis

The 'women as lacking' or vulnerable was undermined by juxtaposing the two facts that while older women are not allowed to travel because they cannot handle travelling alone, it is culturally acceptable that women from a young age can get married [130]. In addition to the delegitimatory strategy of opposition adopted in this example to reveal the social double-standards and inconsistencies, a politeness-oriented euphemism, a device that replaces loathsome or critical terms to avoid making a negative impression, was selected. The wedding night is often culturally euphemised as 'الدخلة' (the day of 'entering', i.e. the wedding night).

130. #1M156 Of course she is not qualified to travel on her own and is not responsible enough.. but her marriage is normal she can get married from the age of 9 years and endure *aldukhlah* [intercourse] and the house [chores]!

Objections to the representation as lacking in mind and treatment of women as minor are very common in #1. For example, a tweep displayed an awareness of the rhetoric driving hegemonic masculine discourses by mockingly suggesting that the new controls were announced solely to convince women that they are, indeed, 'lacking' [131]. Through negation, this underlying stereotype that drives the travel controls was undermined [132].

131. #1M513 They [the masculine patriarchy] want to force you into believing that you are lacking in mind and religion 😊

132. #1M665 The woman isn't from the luxuries or decoration or lacking in mind or nota grown up nor an adult all her life or incomplete and needs the man to complete her

In meta-commentaries, contributors showed awareness of how the adopted gendered depictions work for the legitimation of women's restricted mobility and male control [133]. Since the notion of '*fitnah*' distils an evil 'seductive' aspect to women, dissent was expressed by the bitter suggestion of asking to be removed from such 'blessed' (ironically) country [134].

133. #1M688 Restricting the woman from travelling springs from the way the male-dominated society looks at the woman who is surrounded by suspicion and the source of seduction and vice.

134. #1F270 Women are the cause of *fitnah* [temptation] and trouble take them out of Saudi this blessed land we do not want take us out may God have mercy on your mothers 😞

A metaphor that was commonly used to perpetuate a women-as-domestic discourse defining them in marital terms was conjoined with a popular aphorism. The aphorism comparing marriage to a passing train that should be caught ‘on time’ was re-appropriated in several instances. Its meaning and function were inverted from a description of *9anises* as ‘women who have missed the train’ into ‘it’s better to miss the train than get run over’ by it, e.g. [135].

135. #2F305 It’s okay.. if missing the train is better than being run over by the train..

Several tweeps delegitimated the women-as-domestic discourse in #2 by a meta-discourse revealing an awareness of the manipulation of the statistics of *9anis*-hood for justification purposes. As a response to propositions about other ‘financial’ problems as causes of *9anis*-hood, a female tweep sarcastically, as marked by the emoji, pointed other users to this strategy with ‘solve your problem with unemployment’ [136]. Awareness of a legitimating purpose behind the discourse about high dowries and marriage expenses as well as the stereotyping was also expressed with ‘the whole issue [is brought up] to lower the dowries’ and mockery was directed at the women who get fooled by it with the hypothetical imagery of a woman running for the first suitor [137]. These arguments serve to downplay or trivialise the phenomenon of *9anis*-hood.

136. #2F614 Where is the problem if most of them are employed she can support herself solve your problem with unemployment and leave destiny to that who owns it 😊

137. #2F769 The whole issue [is brought up] to lower the dowries and you Spanish lady [a mock name for Saudi women] will bite your *abaya* [traditional outdoor black dress] [get fooled and you start running after] the first suitor that proposes and it is a gain for them [men] in all cases

Based on such awareness, some men’s requests for lower dowries was compared to their ironic rejection of low dowries for their own sisters because of the cultural belief of ‘our sister is not cheap’, which brings back the notion of commodification and speaking of women in terms of ‘price’ and ‘value’ [138]. This is a delegitimatory juxtaposition that highlights the double-standards adopted by men to help women understand the hegemonic stereotyping of them.

138. #2F727 The men God's name is on them [are screaming] high dowries high dowries but if someone proposed for his sister he would not request except up high with the excuse that our sister is not cheap 😊

For the sake of exposing but disrupting the underlying gendered stereotypes, social inconsistencies were highlighted using double voicedness. Ironic comments were showing orientation to the sentiments of the readers. Here, a positive evaluation at the beginning of the tweet was meant to draw attention to the criticism of the situation of Saudi women that follows, questioning the source of adopted 'habits and traditions' using the derogative metaphor 'disease' [139]. Many tweeps were mocking the labelling of women as *9anises* in #2 by ironic definitions of it to tap on the vagueness of *9anis*-hood in the announced statistics pronouncing one-third of Saudi women as such [140]. Numbers were used to compare the announced number of *9anises* to 'the population' of neighbouring countries to question the credibility of the announced percentage [141]. Underlying such mockery and exaggerations is an understanding of the manipulative functions of such labels and hashtags.

139. #1F936 The law is very nice it doesn't force you to take a *maHram* but he has to give permission this is religion that commanded us to do this or the disease of your habits and traditions?
140. #2F357 I think the one-third that you're talking about are between 19 and 25 #WeirdWayOfThinking
141. #2M486 Is it feasible 4 million *9anis* we have in Saudi more than the number of people in some neighbouring countries

The discriminatory social practices

To delegitimize the gendered discrimination against women, pro-change tweeps employed 'topos of conflict' to emphasise that women's issues are spaces where ideological conflict find grounds leading to the loss of women. Still, the progressive tweeps engaged in a strategy of association to discredit their conservative opponents as well as disparaging evaluations, 'topos of history, 'topos of comparison', and juxtapositions. To continue delegitimizing the arguments of their opponents, they also employed shifts to the formal MSA variety of Arabic, hyperbolic or spatial metaphors, hyperbolic mock suggestions, emotional release (using emojis or hyperboles, negation, or negative-other presentation), and insinuations by means of a 'small story' or illustrative example from living experiences. There were instances of direct and indirect (i.e. mitigated by vague references, irony, passivation, or nominalisation) criticism directed at the status quo and/or policymakers.

Since the legitimacy of the guardianship rule is traditionally supported by a religious discourse, the foundation upon which these patriarchal rules #1 were built was destabilised by a ‘topos of history’. Male-hegemonic laws were said to derive from some of the basic tenets of the strict version of Islam adopted in SA, i.e. ‘الوهابية’ (Wahhabism) such as ‘درء المفسد مقدم على جلب المصالح’ (avoiding evil comes before bringing interests) [142]. This principle was negatively evaluated since the repeated thumbs-down emoji reveal that the statement is not to be read objectively. The ‘الصحوّة’ (the Awakening) movement of the 1970s, c.f. Chapter 2 for background information about it, was highlighted by emphasising the influence of the ideas they propagated about women using brackets [143]. There was much criticism for the originators of the present gendered practices that treat women as though they were the cause of all corruption and immorality because of their presumed vulnerability [144]. The attack was mitigated and made indirect to policymakers through the vague references ‘they’, ‘their’, or ‘those’.

142. #1F303 They follow a system of avoiding evil comes before bringing interests the mentality of the Wahabi religion is the constant suspicion of women 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄
143. #1M403 Since the generation of the awakening and the woman lives (accused and unworthy of trust) from her cradle to her grave! Only because she is (female)! (Pre-Islamic, age of ignorance ideology) that should be fought against
144. #1F820 Those who have enforced these dated laws look at the woman as the cause of all corruption and it is possible that she is used so there must be a permission from a male even if he was incompetent!

The damaging effects of a suggested ‘ideological conflict’ between the liberal and the conservative groups on women’s issues was highlighted by an association to *Daesh*<sup>5</sup> (ISIS) and by the intensifying emoji that expresses a mixed feeling of confusion and victimisation [145]. Some of the following examples start with ‘now’ to temporalise the projected consequences of the new controls within #1. A more moderate stance towards the ongoing ideological conflict and division in the country may be polarising but is adamant in staying outside that conflict [146].

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<sup>5</sup>*Daesh* is the acronymic term popularised by leaders and the media in place of ISIS, the militant group that calls itself al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). (Oakley & Chakrabarti (2016).



145. #1F868 Now the *Daeshis* will attack and call us liberal women and the subject finishes and they prove to be right and any other opinion [that does not agree with theirs] is liberal nasty brainwash 🤔
146. #1M775 We were plagued with two types of people in our society advocates of terrorism and extremism and advocates of decadence and promiscuity each derives its power from the other

This strategy of association was used to ‘discredit’ the conservative in a way that parallels the associations made in conservative discourses, c.f. Section 6.2.3, where pro-change contributors were attached to liberalist ideologies. This pattern was relevant to #1 but not to #2. There were 10 references to ‘داعش’ /da:9iʃ/ (*Daesh*), ‘داعشي’ /da:9iʃiy/ (male *Daeshi*), and ‘داعشيات’ /da:9iʃiya:t/ (female *Daeshi*), meaning a person with a radical mentality, in 10 tweets by female contributors in #1, and twice in one tweet by a male user. Some government officials, judges, were explicitly described as ‘*Daeshi*’ (*Daesh*-mentality conservatives) and people ‘who do not fear God’ [147] to emphasise the humility they expose women to in courts [149], being treated like ‘criminals [148]. At the same time, the religious group were referred to with the term *mutawas*, which has a negative prosody because it has been criticised in various contexts by their ‘more liberal’ opponents.

147. #1F252 Now you’ll find all kinds of humiliation. That means you [are dependent] on your luck if you fall in the hands of one who fears God or a *Daeshi* who does not fear God, ridiculous
148. #1F241 Feeling that you are a criminal while you’re virtue and perfection! I mean instead of explaining my reasons to my guardian I now explain them to a *Daeshi* judge? I want to understand where is the progress in that?
149. #1F943 Now instead of I explain the reasons to my guardian I need to explain them to a *Daeshi* judge who despises me as a woman!! No hey uncle let us remain on the permission better

The rules governing women’s status quo in general were described as discriminatory ones resulting from the system’s reliance on male-dominated religious establishment to design them. They were described as *sheikhs* ‘whose expiry dates has ended’, a consumer-based metaphor, and who ‘are separated from the society’ [150]. With the animalising metaphor of a ‘lab rat’, women were indicated as the victims of religious groups who are so focused on concealing them and diminishing their role in society as though it were a sign of their commitment to religion [151].

150. #1M870 When the job of establishing systems for the society is assigned to *sheikhs* whose expiry date has ended and are separated from the society the result is humiliation of the woman and discrimination against her!



- 151.** #1M566      The Saudi women became a lab rat and a victim for religious people as if their religion would not complete without insulting and humiliating that woman.

Using metaphors like the ones demonstrated above is a key device in persuasive writing. Hence, the consequential hierarchical relationship resulting from guardianship was often represented with a spatial preposition. This strategy objectivates the social practice that downgrades women (van Leeuwen, 2008). Pro-change groups often criticised the guardianship rule as the product of a male-influenced interpretation of those religious texts because it resulted in guardians' 'control over' and 'possession of' women. A woman was said to be placed 'تحت رحمة' (under the mercy of) or 'تحت' (under) a guardian [152], and to have a male 'over her head' as a necessity [153]. The need for more controls was rejected by highlighting the possibility that a guardian may be incompetent, possessive, or abusive. This situation was frequently and metaphorically characterised as being 'sentenced' to 'prison' [154].

- 152.** #1F550      God's law thanks God we are content with but the problem with the man if he mistakably thinks that he owns the wife why should I be under the mercy of a permission letter from a man who can be bad
- 153.** #1F819      That there is a male from her family over her head and it doesn't matter whether he is good or corrupt.
- 154.** #1F327      Her life is jail sentence in Saudi and when her luck is king to her by giving her a wonderful family her sentence is reduced to house arrest.

Metaphors helped depict the status quo as demeaning for women. They furthered the negative evaluation of women's conditions by such lexical choices as 'punished', forced to 'pay the price' for being female, 'prisoners', and 'second-grade citizens' [155]. The guardianship law was negatively designated as a Saudi woman's only 'curse' [156].

- 155.** #1F891      They won't stop messing around and their going around the bush system..Until when the Saudi woman pays the price as a second-grade citizen, a prisoner for policies and under the mercy of wali [custodian]
- 156.** #1F231      If there were a curse on the Saudi woman, the guardianship rule is her only curse in life

Analogies and similes were utilised to compare the treatment of Saudi women to that of criminals, the loss of their rights to something being 'confiscated', and the curtailment of freedom to that of prisoners who have committed a sin [157]. It was argued a form of misogyny that is 'dressed by religion' to enable men to control women [158].

**157.** #1F313 Until when will we endure this criminal-like treatment? Our rights are confiscated, and our freedoms are restricted as if we have sinned. Controls!

**158.** #1F269 Discrimination is practised against the woman legally and is dressed by religion so that the man can enjoy his privileges to control her

Other delegitimatory metaphors compared women to an ‘epidemic’ that needs to be contained [159] or the imposed restrictions to a ‘thread around the neck’ that is played by active demons who wish to control them [160].

**159.** #1F36 As if the Saudi woman is an epidemic that needs to be quarantined before it spreads out on earth.

**160.** #1F329 In the hands of the first demon, then the second then the third .... A thread around the neck of the woman and they hand it over from one active hand to a more active one

Having often depicted women as ‘personal possessions’, e.g. example [115], the ownership was said to be transferred ‘from the man of the house to a man of the government’ with the newly-proposed travel controls [161]. Thus, the institutionalisation of guardianship as a social practice was seen as a strategy of de-agentialisation depriving women their willpower, whose consequences these comparisons help demystify.

**161.** #1F776 We were happy initially [but] it turned out to be a transfer of ownership for the woman from the man of the house to a man of the government as if we’re back to square one 🙄  
#IssueingAPassportWithoutPermission

Drawing on a ‘topos of comparison’, these contributors pointed to forms of institutional and social inconsistency in the system by linking the discourse about the travel controls and a discourse about female-teachers’ and the problems faced by Saudi working women in general. An inconsistency found in the discussion of #1 that was related to the previous associations to *Daesh* invoked a discourse about extremism. It was considered contradictory that women are systematically watched over while people with terrorist-mentality are not. Criticism aimed at the government for supporting masculine hegemony and its leniency with political ‘مساجين’ (prisoners), because they are males, even though they could pose a danger to national security. The criticism was mitigated sometimes by the ambiguous third-person reference ‘they’ [162]. Once, there was a metonymical nomination of a member of a militant group, Khaled Almowallad, who was imprisoned for terrorist charges and with whom a debate was aired on MBC channel, a popular Arabic channel. The same indirect criticism depicted how this ‘type’ of prisoners adopt a religious persona by memorising the Qur’an, wearing short thobes, and growing long beards to get themselves out of prison whereas women are so controlled that a device

could be implanted to monitor them in their rooms using a similar automated device as that used for traffic, i.e. ‘*Saher*’ [163]. It is worth mentioning here that these two examples were contributed by the same female user.

**162.** #1F106 (1) They make the controls over the woman [women] more strict than they are strict on Almowallad [a figure charged with terrorist activities] whom they gave time and had conversation with him and they care for male prisoners more than (they care about) her

**163.** #1F104 (2) The terrorist goes to prison, memorises the Qur’an, make his thobe [dress] shorter and lets his beard grow [following Sunnah] and they let him go out without controls and the poor thing if it were in their hand they would place *Saher* [SA’s automated traffic violations’ system] in her bedroom

Pointing to inconsistencies continued to be used for the dismantling of traditional constructions and constraints specified for Saudi women. The need for permission for mobility was challenged based on a comparison between travelling domestically or internationally [164]. It was also contested by using the ambiguous reference ‘she’ that stands for ‘any woman/many women’, to state that woman ‘already’ travel domestically without permission and with ‘stranger-drivers’ [165]. Many female teachers work in distant villages and are required to commute daily or weekly and it is not any different from travelling abroad [166].

**164.** #1F116 Question/ why does the Saudi woman need a travel consent to travel abroad? While she does not need it to travel domestically and it’s all travelling??

**165.** #1M339 She already travels with a stranger outside her town as far as 300 kms to study and back, she goes out at dawn and comes back at sunset that if she didn’t even sleep in that place.

**166.** #1F82 What is the difference between travelling domestically a thousand kms without a consent or a *maHram* or a 10 kms internationally with a *maHram* and a consent

#1#JustALogicalQuestionNobodyCallsMeKafir (a disbeliever)

Revealing these contradictions allows for double voicedness to enable the emergence of women’s agency through transcending the self, orienting to, and accepting new ways of thinking and being. As a response to singularising Saudi women with travel restrictions in #1, one of the contradictions that were highlighted includes conservatives who ‘scream’ in hashtags against Saudi women’s travel and bring in Muslim maids from abroad into their households [167]. The fact that other Muslim women are not required to have a *maHram* or a travel consent, was claimed to make these restrictions ‘Saudi’ rather than ‘Islamic’ [168].

167. #1F540 Here he is screaming that women’s travel is *Haraam* [forbidden] you are corrupting Muslim women and he has brought himself a Muslim maid from her country why do you corrupt her or does the nationality make a difference 😏😞
168. #1M543 All Muslim women in the world were not requested for a *maHram* or a consent and the difference is that they are Muslims only and we are Saudi Muslims 🙌 their religion is based on the nationality

By confronting anti-change opponents with the limit of the application of their beliefs within their household, change can be endorsed. The idea of ‘outer controls’ described metaphorically as ‘ink on paper’ was deflated as they were juxtaposed with inner values [169]. It was further challenged by focusing on its practical inefficiency in controlling women since no one can monitor a woman if she wants to do something the society does not approve of [170]. This is an inconsistency revealed through argumentation.

169. #1F893 Please whoever does not trust his family [women] should keep them at home. The controls are in the person and ethics and values not conditions placed on paper. I swear by God you’re fools [elongated]
170. #1F517 The method of guardianship is disgusting if the girl wants to do something wrong or deviate it is very easy for her even if she is surrounded by 10 *maHrams* [guardians] and whether she is inside or outside [abroad]

Culturally-shared arguments supporting guardianship were stretched in hyperboles by expanding the number of *wali amrs* to include anyone who can influence the guardian, including the government [171], also example [29] in Chapter 5. the number of guardians whose permission a woman needs to take with the new travel controls was overstated in #1 [172],

171. #1F906 A permission from her *wali amr* [custodian] and her cousins and the men of the tribe and the *imam* [leader] of the mosque and the religious police and the Police and the Civil Defence and the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education
172. #1F366 Now I didn’t understand they removed the guardian’s consent and brought five-hundred responsible department and a letter from the court 😏 where is the change!

To advance a progressive discourse of equality, some tweeps exposed the contradiction of claims that every human being is responsible for his/her own actions against the lack of freedom of choice for Saudi women [173]. The ‘topos of burden’ was drawn upon to articulate that the feelings of uneasiness towards the subordination of women under guardianship are shared between women and their guardians [174].

173. #1F70 If the woman was a creature that does not have the freedom to choose between right and wrong and she was controlled by a wali [guardian] then how does that agree with her responsibility and accountability

174. #1M644 „The woman in Saudi is sick of the restrictions of her wali amr [custodian],, and her wali amr is sick of her and her requirements.

To undermine the perpetuated notion of *9anis*-hood in #2, the idea that the marital status of a woman is a social-responsibility matter, based on the ‘topos of burden’, was negated to affirm that women can take care of themselves [175].

175. #2F459 Misses not 9anises and they are not a burden on the hearts of society, they are handling their own matters

Another instance bringing the ‘topos of history’ into the argument was intended to undermine the legitimacy of current gendered travel restrictions and to silence its defendants by an indirect allusion to a known historical event in the family of Al-Saud when one of their daughters eloped with her lover [176]. A more direct reference to the historical event was found in [177] specifying the princess and the year the incident took place.

176. #1F76 Those who have been bugging us about the issue of guardian consent look the cause of the ban is not religious but a famous story and everyone knows about it so let’s not continue lying to ourselves :)

177. #1F847 You know the decision of the travel ban without a maHram came after the escape attempt of Princess\*\*\*\*\*[masked] with her lover 1977!

In the same way, references to past practices carried out in the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam was another strategy that progressives relied on to criticise the status quo generally or particularly for women. Female infanticide was suggested six times in #1 for analogy, a form of inversion where something from the past is juxtaposed with the present to give it or give the current discriminatory practices new meanings, i.e. describe them as ‘ignorant’ as the time of ignorance [178]. Another juxtaposition was situating the desert rural-way of life in a western-influenced modernity [179]. The different labels of discrimination used for rejecting suitors for a woman based on tribal compatibility were summarised for mockery in [180].

178. #1F357 A decision that is lenient with the man’s [the men’s] travel despite their scandals because he is male! Despicable racism and ignorant infanticide for women!!

179. #2M931 A natural result of us living a western modern life but in a desert rural way!

180. #2M943 It is natural as long as there is racism a *Qabili* [a member of a tribe] does not marry a *Khadhiri* woman [whose origin is not known] and a *Hadhari* [someone from the city] does not marry a *Bedouin* woman and a *Hijazi* [from the district of Hijaz on the Western coast] does not take a *Najdi* woman [from the central region] and a Najdi does not marry a *Janoubiyah* [a woman from the Southern region] 🙄  
 😞 😊

Giving illustrations of the consequences of the rule in the form of a ‘small story’ voicing the personal experiences of acquaintances (Georgakopoulou, 2013), i.e. ‘I know one whose husband...’, was another strategy to denounce the status quo and make the point that male guardianship is unfair to women because it subjects them to the character traits of those guardians [181]. The negative-other presentation and emphasis on the biological sex of the guardian in this comment were mitigated with the shy emoji for politeness purposes. Presenting an argument as a story this way makes it easy for other hashtag contributors to remember and elicits more emotional impact, hence a persuasive strategy.

181. #1F392 I know one whose husband cannot keep himself straight drunk and signs for her while he’s drunk even the drunk man is better than the woman the most important thing is that the gender is male 😊

To delegitimize the controls, assertive oaths invoking the name of God, ‘I swear (by God), were combined with a ‘topos of comparison’ to associate women’s travelling with an illegal act like smuggling [182] or ancient female infanticide [183].

182. #1F66 I swear by the name of God if we were to smuggle hash not [just] travelling, no and they will also ask you why are you travelling? It is none of your business why I will travel! Sickness is growing in you [plural]

183. #1F364 I swear the age of *Abu Jahal* [time of ignorance] and female infanticide was more merciful [to women]

Hyperbolic mock suggestions that involved killing [184 & 185] or burning [187] were prevalent. Among these suggestions/commands was the frequently used hashtag in #1 (6 times) ‘#أختاه\_موتِي’ (#SisterDie). It was added to mock the new controls and index the religious party who often address women with the evocation ‘sister’ [186]. The restrictions on women were ridiculed by commanding women to perish since there is no place for them in the present masculine kingdom. Such rhetoric may be meant to accentuate the tight grip experienced by women because of various imposed-controls. burning,

184. #1F758 I see that killing the woman is better and easier than the arrogant oppressive systems
185. #2M821 To Reduce the percentage: kill them
186. #1F954 A letter from the courts the *sheikhs* [judges] have to dominate ...#SisterDie
187. #1F298 Why don't you gather us and spray us with gasoline and set us alight it would be better you relieve us and be relieved from us forever 🇵🇸

The use of MSA was found to be strategic in intensifying stance taking on the progression side to achieve a certain level of authority while presenting an argument. More often, it helped tweeps to show off a learned mentality using it to simulate religious discourse and approve the new travel controls [188]. It helped to subvert the idea that a woman's life revolves around a man in #2 as well [189].

188. #1M5 #TravelofWomenWithoutAGuardian travelling will be with court consent, where is the westernising in that?! In the *Hadith* [teachings of the Prophet]: the Sultan is the guardian for whoever has no guardian
189. #2F831 Life is not just a man ..... 🌹

Emojis were used by women for emotional release as they expressed their stance towards the status quo. There were instances of this emotive function in either hashtag to express dissatisfaction with the general harsh environment for women with the broken-heart emoji [190] or frustration with the general focus on women [191].

190. #1F280 I didn't get to this stage yet to travel without permission let me rebel and cross the door step without permission 😞 what is this harsh environment 💔
191. #1F450 There is no power but from God the Greatest you don't have any other work to do but that the woman doesn't travel on her own 😞👊👊

Many female tweeps were expressing dissent against traditional depictions of them in #2 by using emojis to express anger at the labelling of women as *9anis* [192] or at the definition of them based on marital status as the only other alternative of 'moral and psychological death' in the life of a woman [193].

192. #2F891 A society that lacks discipline , , it calls the girl who did not marry a *9anis* 🚫
193. #2F757 Some of them [women] think that without marriage they have missed on everything beautiful or beneficial in their lives so it is either marriage or the moral and psychological death 🌸!!

The illustrated data contained rich examples of expressive hyperboles to intensify the delegitimatory effect of posts critical of the status quo and male control and they take various linguistic forms of exaggeration. For example, the dismissive phrase 'not at all'

is a hyperbole to negate the credibility of the statistics of #2 [194]. Superlative adjectives were also used in for the negative-other evaluation of Saudi men, describing them as ‘the most arrogant’ creatures because they want to control the woman who gave life to them [195].

194. #2F404 I’m not convinced at all at all 😞

195. #1F87 And this arrogant creature (the Saudi man) remains the most arrogant against that who has given him life from her body 📌

When the King or his rulings were being criticised, it was commonly mitigated using abstracting nouns as ‘الحكومة’ (the government) or ‘الدولة’ (the State) to replace ‘الملك’ (the king). Such impersonalising the requests forms whose meaning does not have the ‘+human’ semantic feature is another form of metaphor. Such is evident in the metonymic use of these nouns, often personified to conceal or background responsible, involved agents, or to mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance when leveraging criticism towards the monarchy. Furthermore, this example shows the use of the pronoun ‘you’ to accuse or derogate. Many such instances are found in the data [196].

196. #2F540 (1) You have half of the population are unemployed and worthless she can’t cover his own expenses so how can he cover the expenses of the daughter of other people [his wife] and their kids [together]! And the country is not providing them with jobs 1

This is not to say, however, that direct criticisms to the king did not exist [197]. Yet, most criticisms of governmental institutions and systems, meant to ask for change or condemn the status quo and, were indirect by using the word ‘system’, even though the criticism is aimed at the monarchy/government [199198].

197. #1F132 Of course not because we are a country of judicature and judgements that follow the “King’s” whims under the adage that it is “religion, Islam, and justice” The daughters of Al-Saud are not included under this decision.

198. #1F136 one of the worse systems on the face of earth the need for the permission of wali amr [custodian] for everything! An amount of contempt and disparagement for the woman with this oppressive system!!!

Another way of mitigating criticism leveraged at decision makers was through substituting explicit references to them with the vague references ‘they’, ‘them’, and ‘their’ to suggest or criticise, e.g. ‘they allow’, ‘they forbid her from’, ‘they discuss’, ‘they want’ they refuse’, ‘they still’, ‘they couldn’t’, and ‘they do not facilitate’ or ‘they do not treat women’, ‘they do not provide’, etc. as well as ‘their hijab’ and ‘their controls’ [199]. These generalised exophoric references to policymakers and governmental entities endow



them with authority and may be used to distance them, meriting a tweet to be more critically direct [200].

199. #1F771 They say with these controls they want to keep up with advanced countries maybe they mean advanced countries in backwardness
200. #2F532 They are not providing jobs nor helping the young man with an amount of money like Kuwait and they are not controlling the prices either 😞 and they say the dowry is expensive 🤔 They raised my blood pressure this morning

Whenever the third-person pronoun shifts to the pronouns ‘you’ or ‘your’, the criticism becomes more direct, especially where men and the government were addressed together as a single entity [201] or where they are separated assigning men with the rest of the population as subjected to the economic inflation in the country for a more direct condemnation of the government policies [202].

201. #1F279 Whoever sees us would think that perversion has cut us into pieces [we’re so perverted that] we need you to control us .. May God curse you
202. #2F534 (2) The prices and the rent rates are on the rise, and there is no control for the prices then they come and say dowries are high 🙄 Employ the [male] population and they’ll get married 🙄 2

Less frequently, the dummy deictic ‘there’ was found to have similar functions, e.g. ‘there is’ or ‘there isn’t’, ‘we wish there were controls for’ as the last example above exemplified ‘there is no control for prices’. It can be concluded that these are avoidance techniques to mitigate the interlocutory force of critical comments directed at decision makers. One, thus, can conclude that policymakers and decision makers have been included and activated all along and only occasionally suppressed or de-emphasised for mitigation or indirectness.

Irony was also effective when face constraints may be violated, e.g. attacks, critiques, or derogation, while expressing a critical stance (van Dijk, 2006:737). Irony is defined as saying something and meaning another (Rahimi and Sahragard, 2006). It is an avoidance strategy to make accusations indirect (ibid) or mild (van Dijk, 2006). Irony is used in ideologically-charged discourse to strengthen one’s argument while ridiculing something/someone. Thus, while expressing stance, ironies helped contributors avoid jarring social constraints or ‘taboos’ in the present technological and social context. There were more irony-based tweets in #1 than #2 and were mainly found in progressive discourses. For example, the discrepancy between the phrase ‘I liked this phrase’ and the

negative emoji shows the irony is meant to mitigate the criticism of the quote from the news about the suggested controls [203].

**203.** #1F319 Since directions urge for development in systems to keep up with developed countries... I liked this phrase 🤔🤔

The replacement of words, taboo or not, with graphical representations was common, e.g. ‘weapon’ images to express anger at an addressed plural ‘you’ in a ‘funny’ way [204]. The mockery here served to mitigate the force of the message about the current situation of women in this tweet.

**204.** #2F681 On what basis you call who did not get married a 9anis 🗡️! 🤔

As tweeps talk about the status quo, social actions were described, knowingly or unknowingly, in terms of passivation and nominalisation, especially when addressing policymakers who are responsible for regulating the social practices that they wish to change. Many of these are easy to spot in the examples presented in the thesis to avoid repetition, but lexical examples will be given. Nominalisation is another form of passivation for the objectivation of social actions used to mitigate the interlocutory force of a critical comment by impersonalising the accused social actors, here the policymakers, e.g. ‘محكومية’ /maHkuwmiyyah/ (sentence), ‘إعطائها’ /i9Ta:ʔiha/ (giving her), ‘ابتعاثها’ /ibti9a:θaha/ (sending her abroad on a scholarship), ‘تقاذف مسئوليتها’ /taqa:ðuf masʔuwliyyatha/ (tossing her responsibility around), ‘تقييد’ /taqiyyd/ (restriction), ‘تضييق’ /taDiyiyq/ (tightening), and ‘نهب حقوقها’ /nahb Huquwqaha/ (looting her rights). It served to abstract and generalised actions (which can be broken down into micro-actions) to be subverted, e.g. ‘معاملتها’ /mu9a:malatha/ (her treatment), ‘حماية المرأة’ /Hima:yat almarʔah/ (protection of the woman), and ‘يتم التركيز عليها’ /yatimmu altarkiyz 9alaihya/ (the focus is on her) while others explicitly carry negative evaluation, e.g. ‘مسموح’ /masmuwH/ (allowed), ‘ممنوع’ /mamnuw9/ (prohibited), ‘الوصاية’ /alwiSaiyah/ (custody), ‘استعباد’ /isti9ba:d/ (enslavement), and ‘تعنت’ /ta9annut/ (intolerance). Progressives made requests for governmental support using nominalisations, too, e.g. ‘تسهيل إجراءات سفر المرأة’ /tashiyl ʔijraʔa:t safar almarʔah/ (facilitating procedure for the woman to travel), and ‘مكافحة الطلاق بالتوعية’ /muka:faHat alTala:q biltaw9iyah/ (fighting divorce by spreading awareness).

Finally, passive forms were deployed by tweeps to vent out dissent and complain from discriminatory practices in progressive discourses. They explicitly reveal the kind of social practices women are subjected to. According to female contributors, they were

subjected to such verbal processes as ‘يُنْفَالُ’ /yinga:l/ (it is said (about her)), ‘يُسَمَّونُ’ /yusammuwn/ (they are called), and ‘تُقَدِّفُ’ /tuqðaf/ (slandered), or mental processes, e.g. ‘أُجْرَحُ’ /?ujraH/ (get hurt by), ‘تُسْتَغَلُ’ /tusataGall/ (be exploited), or ‘تُحْرَمُ’ /tuHram/ (be deprived). They were, however, more likely to be subjected to behavioural processes, ‘نُعَامَلُ’ /no9a:mal/ (we are treated), ‘تُمارَسُ عَلَيْهَا’ /tuma:ras 9alaiyha/ (practiced on her), ‘تُصادَرُ’ /tuSadar Huquwqaha/ (is/are confiscated), ‘تُعاقَبُ’ /tu9a:qab/ (is punished), ‘يُسَمَّحُ’ /yusmaH/ (is allowed), ‘تُمنَعُ’ /tumna9/ (is prevented from), ‘يُطالَبُوا’ /yuTlabuw/ (they are asked) in #1. In #2, she was the receiver of such actions as, ‘تُخطَبُ’ /tuxTab/ (gets engaged), ‘تُطَلَّقُ’ /tuTallaq/ (gets divorced), ‘تترملينُ’ /titrammaliyn/ (be widowed), ‘تُجبرُ’ /tujbar/ (is coerced), ‘تُسَجَنُ’ /tusjan/ (is imprisoned), and ‘تتجددُ’ /tinjalid/ (gets flogged). Examples in the samples like ‘يُسَفَّرُهَا’ /yusaffirha/ (gets her to travel), ‘يُرَوِّجُهَا’ /yuzawwijha/ (he gets her married) ‘يَنهَمونها’ /yattahibuwnaha/ (they accuse her) or ‘يُضَبِّطُهَا’ /yuDabbiTha/ (he controls her), although not grammatically passive in Arabic whenever the actors were mentioned before or after these verbs, deactivate women’s agency and subject them to male dominance in the same way.

#### Differentiation of Saudi women/SA

Even through it surfaced in progressive discourses resisting it, the differentiation, a polarising emphasis on the uniqueness or singularisation of Saudi women, was pointed to as a wide-blanket normative meso-strategy employed by patriarchal structures to reinforce power relations on the gender level and the State level. Paralleling this strategy is the assimilation efforts meant to delegitimize and dismantle the general obsession with or singularisation of ‘Saudi women’ through assimilation. The collocation of the travel ‘controls’ in #1 with ‘Saudi’ and ‘women’ was seen as an exclusionary technique that separates them from men and other (Muslim) women. It constructs an image of them as ‘unique’, ‘different’, ‘irrational’, or ‘more fragile’ and so in need of restrictions that are tailored specially for them. Similarly, branding a group of women as ‘*9anises*’ in #2 is another singularising strategy that serves as an excuse to place pressure on older unmarried women, perhaps to subdue or manipulate them. It presupposes that marriage is the most important thing in ‘Saudi’ women’s lives, placing the terms ‘one-third of Saudi women’ and ‘*9anises*’ together.

Because of its salient functionality within the debates, the rejection of the singularisation of Saudi women was separated under this section. These delegitimizations

derived on simulating the emphasis on Saudi women using repetition, hyperbolic metaphors, and swearwords to express weariness with it and meta-commentaries about the hashtags. There were also negative evaluations of this ‘focus’ or ‘the controls’ or the ‘the *9anis* label’, interrogations of this focus, sometimes selecting MSA for expression, vague generalisations, direct criticism of the ‘singularity’ and uniqueness of the country with the ‘topos of a terrible place’, and emphasis on its autonomy as a structure that is built upon its male and female populations (assimilation strategy) to call for social cohesion or show empathy and compassion to women.

Progressive contributors were expressing lethargy due to the constructed singularisation of Saudi women because of its negative effects as it obsesses guardians with monitoring women’s behaviour. Repetitions of the keyword ‘controls’ were combined with mockery, since the controls were stretched to the toilet, which was meant to denounce the focus on women in #1 [205]. Repetition for emphasis was accompanied by a negative evaluation of associating women with ‘controls’ [206]. It was a sickening preoccupation that it merited a curse [207].

- 205.** #1M834      Controls for entering the toilet..controls for using the phone  
 ..controls for driving the car ..controls for travelling..It is  
 #TheSaudiWoman
- 206.** #1F934      Controls and controls woman and woman the country that talks  
the most about the woman and every time her situation gets  
 worse than the previous time
- 207.** #1F722      May God tighten your life on you, you and your controls .. All  
what you preoccupy yourselves with is the woman may God keep  
you busy with your eyebrows..

The same applies to the repetition of ‘the woman’ and the juxtaposition of ‘religious police’, the ‘human-rights advocate’, the ‘backward person’, and the ‘liberal’ together show the pervasive interest in debates pertaining to Saudi women [208]. In conjunction with a meta-discourse about hashtags, the singularisation of Saudi women within their keywords was considered evidence of this argument, i.e. ‘every other day a hashtag about women’. Hyperbolic war-related terminology has been deployed to represent this conflict, e.g. ‘attack’ and ‘defend’ were mentioned twice each. With the assumption that women can easily be fooled, it was emphasised that women-related issues have become spaces for ideological conflicts between the two major ideological parties.

- 208.** #1M909      You’re killing us [(killing our mother) for exaggeration] every other  
day a hashtag about the woman [women] and the religious police  
talk about the woman [women] a human-rights’ advocate defending

and a backward man attacking and a liberal challenging and a Salafi defending you have a disease

Repetition of the metonymical word ‘the woman’ again was used to reject that practice [209] and combined with a metaphor depicting women as ‘food’ to mockingly suggest that this word is often added to popularise hashtags [210].

209. #1F631 You don’t have anything but this woman you’re killing us with this woman the woman went the woman came the woman did the woman left may God take the woman I ask for forgiveness from Him.

210. #1M568 We break our fast with the woman have the woman for lunch, have the woman for dinner; if you want a tag or a tweet to become popular shove the mother of the woman [an exaggeration, meaning the word women] in it 🇸🇦💔 You caused us disgust, please stop

Rejecting the singularisation of Saudi women and excluding men from the topics of most ‘trending hashtags’ was present in #2 as well. A question was posted to shift focus to the number of *9anis* ‘males’ followed by a disparagement of the obsessive trend of ‘counting’ women’s ‘steps’ [211]. A meta-commentary posted in the MSA variety to lend the post formality, the obsession with women was considered a reflection of the masculine-led culture that defines women only in domestic terms, a recurrent stereotypical representation that reduces the value of women to their marital situation [212].

211. #2F981 Ok what about the *9anis* men how many are they since the percentage of males in the Kingdom is higher than the female ones or you are just good at counting the woman’s age and her steps

212. #2F74 There is focus on single women in the statistics and the number of single men is not mentioned, because the masculine culture reduces the value of women to marriage only.

As discussed under Section 5.3.1, such rejection of singularisation was conjoined with meta-discourses where the focus on the hashtags’ keyword ‘Saudi’ was dismissed while generalising the phenomenon globally for a strategy of assimilation [213]. ‘*9anis*-hood’ was ironically considered ‘funny’ to point to the absurdity of singling women out with the label in hashtags [214]. Making it relevant to women alone was criticised by male tweeps as well, attracting attention by suggesting an alternative hashtag about ‘bachelor Saudi men’ [215].

213. #2M706 Not specific to the Saudi woman the problem is global 🇸🇦💔

214. #2F732 The word *9anises* is funny 😄 does that mean you do not have enough [other] topics [to discuss] 🙄

**215.** #2M633 So without doubt more than #OneThirdOfSaudiMenAreBachelors how come you did not create a hashtag for us

The gender-based singularisation was delegitimated by making ‘vague’ generalisations about women being the focus of all current debates with ‘all the discussions’ [216]. It was also contested drawing on a religious discourse to affirm equality between men and women through authorisation, i.e. mentioning a governmentally-assigned religious figure, a court’s ‘chief judge’ [217]. In #2, the negative effects of the practice of social labelling were also affirmed by a simile invoking an analogy to ‘a killer who marches in his victim’s funeral’ [218].

**216.** #1F21 All the discussions have come to revolve about the women [women] as if she is the only creature on earth... we ask for travel controls for the man too

**217.** #1F770 The chief judge of another court has mentioned that in the orthodox shariah law the woman and the man who are mature adults should not have a wali (guardian) over them.

**218.** #2M387 Whoever uses labels for others with his own terms is like that who kills the victim and then walks his funeral

Such differentiation and focus on women was contravened through an assimilation strategy where contributors call for unification while discussing ‘shared worries’ [219] or calling to give women back their rights so that they can be more functional in the service of their nation, which necessitated the negation of the stereotype that places women under scrutiny [220].

**219.** #1M630 Every era has its rules for development and systems that provided safety to all I see the necessity of facilitating travel procedures for the woman [women]

**220.** #1F108 The country’s affairs and its development will not hold until the woman is treated as a functional living being that has its dignity and not a creature whose behaviour fall under suspicion!!

Finally, the strategy of differentiation also exists on the State level in depictions of the country as different from other countries due to its conservative values, i.e. what is commonly known in this context as Saudi ‘الخصوصية’ (singularity). Hence, it was attacked to express a progressive stance in #1 by mocking an excerpt quoted from the news about the amended travel controls as ironically ‘eye-catching’ and as usual explained by the ‘singularity’ of the country [221]. Parallel to a trend of disparaging the status quo or the new controls is the deployment of the topos ‘of a terrible place’ depicting marriage in SA as a ‘nightmare’ and that all what women wish for is to migrate [222].

**221.** #1M981 What attracts attention in the news ...is the statement ((and keeping up with developed countries)). !! :) Hey father of singularity.. be wise!!.

222. #2F192      The age of 9anis-hood is gone you think that the girl here now cares much about marriage look for us it is a nightmare now all what the girls care about is to run away from this country

### 6.3.2 Transforming the status quo

Transformation is the macro-strategy of pro-change tweeps who wish existing socially-shared discourses and constructions are altered by re-appropriating them and encouraging or suggesting changes. This was done by disrupting their meanings in the Saudi context indirectly with humour, i.e. laughter, sarcasm, irony, mock suggestions, or parody, and directly with emphasis on discontinuation that lead to the unfair way women are treated, socially and institutionally.

#### 6.3.2.1 Humour

Humouring social incongruities is aimed at exposing them to scrutiny but it may serve to stimulate an atmosphere for social bonding or solidarity by creating a positive shared experience (Kwon et al, 2014:277). Therefore, whereas the more ‘serious’ examples of pointing to social or institutional incongruities were placed under the dismantling strategy, Section 0, the humorous ones were placed under transformation because, I am suggesting, they serve the double functions of social bonding and persuasion. Although traces of laughter were dispersed throughout Chapters 5 and 6, because of its salience and its function in helping to subvert received ways of thinking, viewed in terms of Bakhtin’s notion of ‘double voicedness’, it was considered a strategy worth focusing on, though briefly.

The data shows that laughter, with the aid of emojis or without, had functions beyond emotional release. Other realisations of this strategy to disrupt the continuity of socially-established gendered notions and practices damaging to women include irony, (hyperbolic) mock suggestions, sometimes combined with meta-discourses, and parodies. Laughter targeted phrases quoted from the news about the suggested travel controls to soften a criticism of them [223]. It was used for emotional release as well while expressing a stance that is against the status quo of women in general as reflected by this quoted phrase [224] in #1. ‘Fossilised’ gendered definitions of women that are neither solely traditional nor abandoned by the women themselves, were undermined to subvert the fantasy-based conceptualisations of marriage [225] in #2.

223. #1M732      I liked keeping up with the developed countries [a quoted phrase from the news] hahahaha

224. #1F765 They say the Kingdom is keeping up with the developed countries, rather the right thing is that we are keeping up with the European [Gregorian] fifteenth century LOL.

225. #2M721 Nothing makes me laugh as much as that [woman] who dreams of a knight to come to her on a white horse 😂

Laughter, sometimes, relied on humouring social incongruities, e.g. men's calls for polygamy despite their failure at supporting/controlling one wife [226]. By doing that, what is culturally accepted was presented as a derived construct, not an original that should be abided to. Thus, laughter while engaging in negative-other presentation, here men, was a critical linguistic device that enabled the redefinition of meanings to work or the speakers to save the 'face' of the criticised, thus mitigating inter-personal conflict (ibid:283).

226. #2M952 This is all in one side and on the other side is whoever says accept polygamy 😂 you should thank your God you found one who accepts you and you want another? 😂 >of course I am a Spanish [a common slang metaphor for Saudi]

Tears-of-joy emoji often marked laughter directed at the self or the other [227], at the new controls [228] or the status quo of viewing marriage as most important to women in general [229].

227. #2M777 9anis is a harsh word first time for me to feel that I am tender 😂😂

228. #1F684 A permission from the court 😂😂😂!!!?? That is worse than the guardian's consent!! !!

229. #2F630 Our problem is that we are a nation for whom marriage is the only axis of life 😂

In the same way as laughter, sarcasm was deployed as a de-aligning strategy that is not as bitter at the presence of emojis as it is without. Emojis suggest that a comment is to be understood in a non-literal manner. Tongue-out and winking emojis are often considered primary marks of sarcastic intent (Filik, Hunter, and Leuthold, 2005), which the data attests to, even on their own [**Error! Reference source not found.**], but other emojis supported such an effect, e.g. smiles and smirks. Sarcastic but ironic remarks using love and laughter emojis were celebrating the suggested changes to women's travel controls [231] or mocking the gendered (and gendering) representation of *9anis*-hood that limits women by questioning its age-definition [232].

230. #2M383 😂😂😂

231. #1F963 Woow 🎉 no really woow 🎉😂 bravo as a first step 🎉 May the full freedom be next 🎉



232. #2F879 I've just turned 20 I'm considered a *9anis* right 😏?

Without emojis, sarcastic comments were bitter expressions of de-alignment. The first example the two voices of the tweep and 'the Saudi man' can be heard, represented masculine control as 'the utmost irony' while pointing to males' privileging with the pondering question 'should I allow her to live?' [233]. Similarly, the news about the suggested controls was dismissed with an aphorism [234] and their application by the government was questioned by relating a personal anecdote [235] in #1.

233. #1M57 The utmost irony .. while the Saudi man enjoys the luxuries of life he thinks in front of a *kabsa* dish [a rice and meat traditional dish] ..should I allow her to live?

234. #1F263 We could have but we couldn't I wish they were never born [the changes are useless]

235. #1F986 My sister's son is 12 he will become her *wali amr* [custodian] before any decision related to women's travel be executed

In #2, these comments were aimed at men who advocate for polygamy through a scenario that shows them as incapable [236], which is similar in rhetoric to [228] above, or mocked their superficial requirements and lack of self-worth [237].

236. #2F384 They want polygamy now you become a man first and be able to cater for the kids of one and then say I'll get married to two he brings ten kids and is destitute then cries what did I do

237. #2M573 Most young men his face is a knee [he is ugly] ..and his salary is weak and he has requirements he wants her a beauty queen.. and he reaches the age of 35 and he doesn't know the value of himself

Closely relevant to sarcasm is the deployment of hyperbolic mock suggestions for laughter as evident in #1 where the tendency was to creatively express dissent in progressive discourses, by suggesting extreme, or illogical measures to be done to women, e.g. a tracking device [238]. They were used to stretch the socially-shared scepticism of women's behaviour to the extreme, exemplified by the sarcastic suggestion that a camera should be fixed on the forehead of every woman when she travels [240]. Here, these suggestions index the possible use of technology for such monitoring. They were also deployed for irony, suggesting a chaperon from the Religious Police to be sent with every woman when she travels [239].

238 #1F178 A tracking device that is attached to the foot and they set a specific distance which if you cross they catch you what do you [plural] think! Really that's what is left to do 😏😂😂😂😂

- 239 #1F962 I suggest that the #1 include installing a camera on the forehead of every woman when she travels, that takes live footage horizontally and vertically!
- 240 #1F877 I suggest sending a man from the *hay'ah* [the Religious Police] with every woman who travels to protect her from temptations 😏

Drawing on meta-discourses for the sake of positioning themselves, some contributors mocked the new controls through suggesting other sarcastic, sometimes absurd, new hypothetical ‘controls’ in #1 that stretch the notion to extremes in continuation of the main and similar hashtags that single Saudi women out and constrain them, e.g. toilet [241] and breathing [242]. They suggest other spaces where women could be controlled lest, for instance, they have intimate relationships with *Jinn* [241]. As a micro-strategy, sarcasm plays on the stereotypes depicting women as irrational and vulnerable, controlled by their instincts.

241. #1F929 What is left is only #ControlsForAdmittingSaudiWomenIntoToilets 😏 Think of it she might have a relationship [euphemism for have sex] with the jinn?

242. #1F326 We are waiting for controls of the woman’s [women’s] breathing ...  
In #2, the word ‘*9anises*’ was mocked by offering alternative keywords for the hashtag that suggest a view of unmarried women as living more ‘comfortable’ lives than married ones [243].

243. #2F549 The hashtag is wrong 😞!! It should be like this  
#OneThirdOfSaudiWomenAreLivingComfortably

A parody is another linguistic manifestation of humorous exaggeration in the playful imitation of the words of another: prior texts, authors, songs, or aphorisms, to the effect of mitigating a subversive slur (Sclafani, 2009:615). To destabilise traditional stereotypes of women, there were inversions of very common phrases in #1 to parody fixed social constructions. For example, the ‘Saudi’ part in ‘*المرأة السعودية*’ /*almarʔah alsu9uwdiyiyah*/ (the Saudi woman) is transposed into a similar ‘sounding’ word that is evaluative ‘*المرأة التعوسية*’ /*almarʔah alta9uwsiyiyah*/ (the miserable woman) to highlight the unhappy situation of Saudi women [244]. In #2, a similar instance occurred when a female tweep purposefully and creatively inverted a common aphorism, usually in the Egyptian Arabic dialect, ‘*ظل رجل ولا ظل حيطة*’ /*Ḍilli ra:jil wala: Ḍilli HiyTah*/ (shade of a man is better than shade of a wall) into ‘*ظل حيطة ولا ظل رجل*’ /*Ḍilli HiyTah wala: Ḍilli ra:jil*/ (shade of a wall is better than shade of a man) in a man-hating discourse meant to blame-shift the source of the *9anis*-hood issue and negatively evaluate Saudi men [245].

244. #1F707 I swear they are laughing at us are you [plural] serious these controls and court and a document what is left to empower the miserable woman what is left o' our wise government

245. #2F523 The shade of a wall is better than shade of a man 🙄

Parodying popular songs created a link to a discourse of media when tweeps mocked the travel controls [246], changing the words of a national anthem to criticise the situation of women [247].

246. #1F557 That means if she had connections in the Passports [department] it will be facilitated..?! Then that who has connections in the airlines tayyarah .. tayyarah [plane..plane], a popular song about travelling, meaning she will travel]


247. #1F284 Hey controls] and the woman is sacrificed for you continue and the court is with you continue 🎵🙄 [a national song, originally saying: my country continue God is with you continue and we are sacrifices for you continue

#### 6.3.2.2 *Emphasis on discontinuity*

The second transformational strategy is emphasis on 'discontinuation' which entails emphasis on difference or discontinuity, e.g. difference between then and now or now an (Wodak et al., 2009). It is aimed at promoting change not at delegitimizing the status quo. It was realised through various argumentation schemes (topoi), such as topos of comparison and time, or disrupting preconceived views of/about women through positive self-presentation and negative-other presentation, and the topoi of change, progress, consequence, 'you can't have one without the other', or 'sugar-coated world', as well as negation, rhetorical questions, mock suggestions, derogatory metaphors, re-appropriation of an established metaphor for women, i.e. the queen, denunciation of the status quo as 'radical' or 'obsolete', and emphasis on the need for change for the autonomisation of the country.

There were disruptions and discontinuations emphasising difference using the 'topos of comparisons' and 'topos of time', before and now or our fathers and ourselves, to advance a progressive viewpoint or undermine the travel controls [248]. Also, difference between the conditions of travel in the past and the present were aimed at disrupting the continuation of the adopted travel controls [249].

248. #1F716 There is no comparison between a woman travelling in a desert on a camel and one on an airplane with safety and many people!

**249.** #1F549      Travelling in the past took months and was not safe for both genders  
but now in less than a day you reach the end of the universe 

Disruption of existing patterns occurred through re-appropriating an established metaphor to use it against its originators. One that needed to be discontinued was the Saudi woman-as-queen construction, originally meant to disguise a gender difference discourse that stereotypes women as demanding, precious, or worthy of protection. Drawing on its traditional usage was mainly intended to discontinue that stereotype. One male tweep claimed that since a Saudi woman is popularised as a ‘queen’, she should be left to do whatever she wants to do is entailed tapping on the nuances of the semantic meaning of the word [250].

**250.** #1M2      So long you have given her the title of queen then it is her right to travel to wherever she wishes.

Aimed as a discontinuation of the widely-circulated negative stereotypes of women, there were instances where contributors presented Saudi women in a very positive light. This could have a transformative effect as they were used to defend women against the imposition of controls by asserting their valuable role in the community inside and outside their homes [251 & 252]. Their role as mothers was stressed whenever the new controls were celebrated in #1, here by quoting a poetic verse from the Arabic literature, i.e. ‘the mother is a school...’ [253].

**251.** #1F738      Controls!!!! A word that is not used except for place rules. And not for humans and which human? The best of humans. The mother and the sister and the daughter!!!

**252.** #1F109      The woman is capable and contributes to the advancement of the community rather she is its great pillar, stop putting her down ...

**253.** #1M321      The best news I heard in my life ! the mother is a school that if you prepared you have prepared a pure nation

Positive metaphors and aphorisms/sayings were also employed in progressive discourses to promote progress, no matter how minimal it is [254 & 255]. This was found applicable to #1 but not #2 where there is no progress to be evaluated except that women who have become or want to become financially independent were occasionally negatively evaluated as the cause of *9anis*-hood as previously-explored under a Discourse of Equality, Section 5.2.2. Gradation was often emphasised.

**254.** #1M352      Rain starts with a drop! ..

**255.** #1M554      [This is] the equivalent of hateful extremism because change and correction does not come in one shot one by one [easy on me] hey Milwani [a popular proverb] #IssuingAPassportWithoutPermission

Another form of discontinuation in #2 was the juxtaposition of a negative evaluation of the motives of marriage for women in the past and positive evaluation of it in the present time, underlining a progressive stance towards marriage as an independent choice [256]. To accentuate agency and choice, the present generation of youth was also juxtaposed with previous generations' understanding of marriage [257].

256. #2F824 The days when I would marry just anyone to silence people are gone! The world is more conscious? I either marry someone who deserves that I spend my life with or I live my life for myself.

257. #2F269 What do we want with marriage 🤔 they think we are like our mothers' generation dying to get married

For juxtaposition as well, code-mixing English and DA served to emphasise the influence of some popular names of Western and Turkish TV-series on the mentality of the youth in comparison to the arranged marriages adopted culturally. Arranged marriages were dismissed by describing them with the merchandise-based metaphor of 'scratch and win' [258]. Such apposition is transformative because it offers audiences new, likely Western, ways to imagine women and marriage in comparison to a consideration of it as the only potential in the past.

258. #2M240 الجيل الحالي ليس كالجيل السابق أصبح و مهند/لميس و Grey's Anatomy يشاهد Game of Thrones مما يقلل رغبته في زواج اكشط و اربح  
The current generation is not the same as the previous one. They watch Greys Anatomy, Game of Thrones, Lamis and Muhannad [referring to Turkish romantic series], which cause them not to want to get married the old scratch and win way.

Besides celebrating gradual change in the situation of women, one of the transformative strategies employed pejorative metaphors as predicates of assertions that suggested the death/discontinuation of something. The radical 'sick' ideas and their owners should be swept away [259] or 'dated habits' and traditions that are considered among the root causes of the *9anis*-hood [260]. They also manifested in emphases on the death of someone, e.g. originators of dated traditions who have died but their habits survived [261] or suggesting the death of those who call women *9anises*, presuming it as an old pattern of thinking about women as 'domestic'.

259. #1F861 The radical solution to this disaster is sweeping the owners of sick and obsolete ideas and everyone who adopts for habits of people who have died and had enough dying [exaggeration] and applies it now !

260. #2M320 I expect the two main causes [of *9anis*-hood] are dated habits and financial greed

261. #2F552 As if we're dying to get married !! And those who say [the word] *9anises* are dead 😞 now with the internet fun and freedom ...

whoever marries is the *9anis* 🏃🏻‍♀️😂

Topos of 'you can't have one without the other' using metaphors was also another strategy for transformative discontinuation. To mock the newly-suggested travel controls, this topos was employed by a parallel comparison between allowing Twitter use but not having an internet line and allowing women to issue their own passports, but not to travel without their guardian's consent (or court) [262]. It was emphasised that the news about going to court for a travel consent would be scandalous and would attract negative attention from the developed world or, even worse, become a source of an international stigma [263]. The awareness of the disadvantaged position of women in the data suggests that more reforms are to be expected.

262. #1M89 She can issue a passport but she can't travel without consent = she can use Twitter but without internet 🏠

263. #1M639 , , who believes that this decision is in the twenty first century, , I swear by God it is a stigma and an international scandal!!!

There were other discontinuations emphasised when progressives suggested rhetorical questions to interrogate the subjection of women to continuous suspicion [264] and presuppose urgent need for change for humanitarian reasons [265]. Underlying these critical questions are high expectations for a progress in the situation of women.

264. #1F105 It's funny that the travel of "a living creature" is subject to interrogation and investigation!! How many years do we need to realise the joke in the subject??

265. #1F122 When will the guardianship era over women end and she gets to be treated as a human being with complete eligibility?! #rights #legalities

Therefore, several users suggested that the government should disassociate itself from obsolete traditions by way of a metaphor of throwing into the bin [266]. This is seen as a reflection of the struggle the government is having with the current religious institution by means of a historic reference back to the legacy of 'Wahhabi Islam' when Muhammed bin AbdulWahhab and his family were supporters during the establishment of the country [267]. The government and Wahhabi Islam were projected already as separate models in this comment which underscores the fast development people are witnessing in the country.

266. #1M924 I think that it is on the government [its duty] to throw the controls of the seventh Gregorian century into the bin instead of decorating it for us and pretending it as keeping us with the modern age

267. #1M51 The government doesn't want until now to divorce *Wahhabism*, even if it is going in the direction of a *Wahhabism* that is more open than its predecessor...

However, it was frequent to see negation followed by an exception to highlight a progressive stance towards women's travel and driving. This tool was employed in #1 to approve of the newly-suggested controls while generalising this evaluation to the gradual top-down policy changes needed in a conservative society as SA [268].

268. #1M176 Away from [the issues of] travelling or driving any new decision for the society would not succeed except with controls so that the intellectual can accept it first, and this is the beginning of change


Discontinuation to affirm the need for transformation also employed the 'topos of change/progress' to strike a comparison between the developed world and the situation of Saudi women [269]. Another discontinuation scheme that served anti-discrimination rhetoric meant to assert the equal right of mobility for both male and female citizens is the 'topos of justice', juxtaposed against a description of the status quo as 'enslavement' [270].

269. #1F627 Life has changed I can buy a product from the end of the world don't say who protects her it's the opposite there she is safe contrary to here [where there are] harassment and the religious police [compared to *Daesh*, the militant group ISIS].

270. #1M374 A human regardless of his gender male or female has the mobility right without the custody of anyone, this is justice and what you are doing is enslavement.

Other manifestations of this strategy include 'topos of consequences' or 'something follows as a direct result of something' using the phrase 'it is necessary' to suggest that gradation is important to implement change [271]. The new controls were applauded with the 'topos of progress' as gradual steps in the direction of transformation [272].

271. #1F264 As long as this thing is new to us as a very conservative community putting these controls initially is necessary and may be

the beginning of the driving decision   
272. #1F174 I see this decision as a preface to coming decisions in the favour of the woman because gradation is important at an environment that was programmed on previous orders ingrained in it



Having declared radical ideas driving the status quo of women as ‘obsolete’, the topos of ‘sugarcoated world’, which suggests a special form of consequence, was used to point to the positive consequences of the propagated action, e.g. free mobility for women, which is associated with the return of the ‘dignity’ of a woman [273] and beautiful things like the hashtagged ‘#RemovalOfGuardianshipRule’ [274].

273. #1F530      Also this decision gives back some of the Saudi woman’s dignity that she is an independent entity that follows no one but herself 🍀
274. #1F170      Change is a stage that needs to be managed professionally, I see beautiful things coming a coming decision of #RemovalOfGuardianshipRule

Finally, another transformative strategy draws on autonomisation, an emphasis on the autonomy and independence of the country, which is claimed the motivation for change in refutation of calls for conservation [275]. Preconceived views of women are juxtaposed with and negated by a humanitarian point view here. The future of the country was associated with the situation of women and giving them liberty was considered a ‘must’, juxtaposed against a derogative comment directed at anti-change contributors, who are described here as ‘small minds’ in analogy to the same stereotype they use for women, i.e. ‘lacking in mind’ [276]. It helps to advance arguments of disaster while approving of anticipatory changes and suggesting that they are coming gradually as a calming measure of the community [277].

275. #1F405      My country and society will rise when it realises that the woman is “an independent complete human being” and not a lacking or disturbed being living her life according to what the man wishes
276. #1M654      There must be progress in the State and the woman must be given a little freedom!! As for those with small minds who say that there has to be a *maHram* [male guardian] and pretend to be chaste on us please *tuzz* [a dismissive trivialising expression in Arabic] 😞
277. #1F831      Cancelling the travel consent is coming but these are preparations to relieve the trauma on the society 😊 May the cancellation of the joke of guardianship rule be next 🙌

## 6.4 Conclusion

Having identified the broader discourses that were recontextualised by anti-change tweeps and pro-change in relation to the issues at hand and how they were re-appropriated for ideological positioning in Chapter 5, the focus of the present chapter on the various discursive strategies that the two groups of tweeps employed represents the second main



contribution of this thesis. Together, the two chapters fulfil the primary aim of this thesis to reveal the multiple voices that exist in contributions to Saudi women-related hashtag debates. Anti-change tweeps strategically utilised macro-level strategies of perpetuation (by the meso-strategies of reiterating traditional polarised representations, and stereotypes, and justifying the status quo) and dismantling (through delegitimation by discrediting opponents and undermining calls for change) to defend traditional discourses and social practices. In contrast, their pro-change opponents focused on dismantling (by transforming social-actor representations and delegitimizing the arguments of their opponents by discrediting them and undermining the present social practices that are damaging to women, including the stereotypes and singularisation) and transformation (through humour and exposure of social and structural discontinuities) to express a critical stance towards the status quo of women, discontinue and disrupt established views of women, and encourage social change. The role of the strategies of intensification and mitigation in the service of legitimations and delegitimizations was apparent. The distribution of these macro-strategies corresponds with the goal each group is oriented to achieving in the Saudi online sphere.

The meso-level strategies described above were realised in various linguistic, semantic, and tropological means of realisations. Recurrent amongst them was the deployment of referential and predicational strategies, metaphors, laughter, sarcasm, derogation, emojis, negation, and various topoi. These strategies were creatively utilised by the two ideological groups as ‘resources’ to take a stance. The findings reveal how shared perceptions of women’s issues were played with, or moulded, by the progressives with such strategies to paint a potentially different view of women and their rights.

Conservative tweeps, however, perceived the liberation of women, who are overdetermined as symbols of the country’s religious devotion and conservative way of life, as a threat to the identity of SA and the prevalent gender norms. The greater diversity in the creative strategies employed by the progressive tweeps, as the findings have revealed, reflect the desire of most tweeps in my samples to improve the situation of women in general, imagining a future where they are granted more freedom and independence.

## Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter offers a discussion of the results of the present thesis, guided by the research questions presented in Section 3.3. I reiterate how the answers were obtained, and demonstrate how they led to renegotiations of gender identities, roles, and power relations in the Saudi society. Reflecting on the transformative potential of Twitter as a relatively new digital platform, it has helped transcend physical social barriers of gender-segregation within the Saudi socio-political context. Since an investigation of the tweeps' offline identities was not possible, this research's findings will be compared to findings of similar studies on the Saudi discursive Twitter-hashtags terrain where appropriate, c.f. Section 3.2.5.

### 7.1 The emergence of a feminist movement in hashtag debates

This study adopts a post-structuralist conceptualisation of gender and discourse to address shortage in discursive studies about the situation of Saudi women. It is interested in assessing Twitter's social significance in an already fast-developing social context in SA. It aims to reveal how the multi-perspectives of the Saudis, who are caught between tradition and modernity, express their viewpoints regarding two women-related hashtag debates concerned with travel and marriage. The virality of these debates itself marks the interest of the tweeps in continuing the exchange of conversations regarding these issues and reconstructing their reality. This section attempts to offer a synthesis that relates the findings of the thesis and demonstrate how the two issues under study were addressed in the samples.

Historically, the restrictions on women gained strength from the collaboration between the government and the religious establishment. With the ideological changes brought about by modernity and globalisation, this affiliation started to gradually wane, as hinted at by several tweeps. When discourses and underlying ideologies undergo parallel change prior to or at the time of policy changes, resistance to new national decrees forced from above by policy can be minimised (Almaghlouth, 2017). As change becomes popular, it starts to transform into a social construction in the making, through initiating new discourses to promote change or dismantle the 'undesirable' status quo. Since 'new kinds of discourse' are both 'a consequence of social change' and 'an instrument' of it (Cameron, 2001:129-30), social change in SA is bound to influence the way its people

communicate. The Saudi government has previously imposed top-down changes despite expected resistance from the conservative party, but their position was slowly weakened once the new policies became normalised as was the case with women's education, their participation in municipal elections and in the Consultative Council of the King, and driving. This makes studies of people's discursive exchanges online during a period of reform, like the present one, an act of historicising and registering how change is socially perceived and received.

The online discourse was rife with assertions of polarisation in references to and definitions of gendered identities and pointed to a pervasive tension between patriarchal norms and resistance to them. There were traces of conflict, overt or covert, between the genders, between men and women, and ideologies, represented as anti- and pro- social change groups. This polarisation manifested in categorisation of 'us' and 'them' and other-negative presentations. Like the separation between the sexes, the separation between the two main ideological groups could be explained by the absence of a public platform for debating or the skills to perform it, despite the establishment of the 'the National Dialogue Program on religion, extremism, and women' in 2003. Polarised groups engaged in negative-other presentation, i.e. men of women and women of men, progressives of conservatives and the conservatives of the progressives (van Dijk, 2006). While most of these polarisations still constitute a universal problem, they resemble those which exists in Western representations of the Self and the Other, being men and women or Western and Arab/ME individuals, who are often viewed as homogenous groups that are dichotomised into powerful/powerless or liberated/oppresed (Arebi, 1994; Inglehard and Norris, 2004).

In line with post-structuralist propositions against perpetuating binary oppositions (Baxter, 2010), the gender binary was not adopted, and gender was not viewed as a fixed construction, especially with the lack of demographic or offline information about the users; rather a social construction being negotiated and redefined. The diverse positions were neither easy to pin down as dichotomous nor intended as such. Therefore, they were considered on a continuum of conservation-progression. The categorisation of anti-change/conservative and pro-change/progressive voices was adopted to organise presentation of findings only. Additionally, the Discourse of Patriarchy/Dominance and the Gender Equality Discourse were seen on a paralleling continuum and not viewed as opposites, and the macro-strategies identified by Wodak et al. (2009) were considered on

a perpetuation-transformation spectrum because they were mutually drawn upon by the two main stances towards the status quo and/or change. Further polarisations included classifying women as either good/obedient or bad/rebellious, a slave or a liberal, oppressed or liberated, covered (protected with *hijab*) or uncovered (exposed without *hijab*), or married or *9anis*, and classifying guardians as either good or bad/*dayooth maHrams* or *Daeshi* (only in #1) or liberalist.

Similarly, the status quo and change, which may have been projected by the tweeps or in the analysis as dichotomous, could not be separated as opposing entities. This is especially the case since the perception of change could not be generalised. Before showing this overlap, it is important to understand at this point how the ‘status quo’ and ‘change’ were depicted in the research samples. On the one hand, tweeps with a more conservative stance defended polarised gendered/religious/ideological identities in terms of black/white, i.e. you are either with US or AGAINST US. The status quo was conveyed in positive terms as the norm, the religious way of life that follows the ‘will of God’. It perpetuates mainstream strict interpretations of religious injunctions that ought to be protected from liberalist agendas, Westernisation, and moral decay. They represented change negatively, often with argumentations schemes such as the topos of threat, catastrophe, or as part of a foreign conspiracy that targets corrupting women, a threat to the national identity and the autonomy of the social structure as entailed by the overdetermined role ascribed to women as symbols of the country’s religious values. For that reason, they often enlisted the support of policymakers in preserving the current restraints on women.

On the other hand, tweeps with a more progressive stance depicted the unchanged situation of women as discriminatory, restrictive, unjust, and inconsistent. They focused on transforming it via various discursive strategies including criticism, derogation, argumentation, and intensification. Current gendered practices were portrayed as ‘radical’ and based on a misunderstanding of Islamic teachings. They depicted change positively as an urgent need, a natural process, or, supported by human-rights rhetoric, as a process of giving women ‘back’ their ‘dignity’. The urgency of change was explained with emphasis on the modified social role women are expected to play in the advancement of the economic situation of the country with its new national discourse of reform and the expanded inclusion of women in the public sphere. While the positive consequences were emphasised, calls for change were strategically made national because foreign

intervention could be damaging to their cause, because their intentions have been reduced by their opponents into ‘liberal agenda’.

Change in #1 meant seeking to undermine the travel constraints on women in particular and the guardianship rule in general for what is perceived as a liberation for women. However, #2 was a space appropriated by men to pursue sexual, financial, and ideological interests and solve their problems. Therefore, it may be argued that the binaries emerging from the analysis could be problematised by showing how the D/discourses found in the sampled debates intersect with discourses drawn from the domains of politics, religion, ideology, gender identity, traditions, tribal culture, finance and consumerism, modernity, education, scholarships, abuse of power, tourism, humanitarianism, and personal or family exposure to other languages and cultures.

It seems strategic that, although the highlight of the news spurring #1 was suggested to allow women to travel without consent in cases of conflict or absence of guardians, the discussion was diverted by most contributors to one about being accompanied with a ‘*maHram*’. Whenever intentionally selected, however, the term ‘*wali amr*’ was negatively evaluated in progressive discourses in #1 but in conservative discourses in #2. This implicates that there is a general agreement on the preference of a ‘*maHram*’ as a travel companion when a woman feels vulnerable or incapable, but not on the hierarchical relationships or curtailment resulting from the guardianship law. Male dominance was supported with masculinised mainstream religious discourse and cultural stereotypes of women as lacking, irrational, privatised, fragile, or queens. Each group complained about the consequences of patriarchy based on what interests they pursue, i.e. free travel is seen to serve women, but low dowries or modest marriage arrangements are seen to mainly serve men.

While traces of the same stereotypes of women as irrational, superfluous, queen, or lacking were found in #2 as well, the Discourse of Patriarchy in it intersects with a discourse about the obstacles of marriage raised by the requirements of women’s guardians, whether tribal, religious, or financial, as the cause of the high percentage of spinsterhood. Guardians were also blamed by the same anti-change contributors for not convincing their daughters to accept polygamy and this criticism was legitimated with decontextualised quotations from religious texts. These discourses emphasised women’s lack of agency but were shown to be challenging to men who wish to marry. In other words, men were the ones suffering the consequences of such patriarchy when it comes

to marriage, forcing them to be hypocrites and pretend to fit into all the required categories until they are married. Afterwards or abroad, they can express themselves and become who they want to be.

Generally speaking, the recontextualised social practices of women's travel and marriage reflected the way they are socially constructed in SA as interactive/transactive. They involved two (or more) participants (actor/recipient) where 'actors' are given a greater range of 'actions', which lends them more agency as indicated in the meaning of the verbs they perform. For example, a guardian extends his consent (actor) for a woman to travel (recipient), or he (actor) finds her (recipient) a good husband (goal), a man (actor) proposes to the guardian (recipient) to marry the woman (goal) and her custodian (actor) approves or disapproves of the marriage between his daughter (recipient) and the suitor (recipient), etc. The phenomenon of *9anis*-hood was further constructed as just 'happening', i.e. eventuated, commonly related to religious discourse of destiny, ordained for a woman (recipient) by God (actor), because of luck, or was made the common-sense result of other financial or natural phenomena.

Studying the way male and female tweeps contribute to the conversations in the two threads under investigation, some patterns were noticed that are worth pointing to. The two social groups mutually invoked the discourse of male dominance, sometimes to perpetuate it, but mostly to dismantle it within progressive discourses. While the Gender Equality discourse was similarly relied on in #1 more than it was in #2, it was invoked more by female tweeps in #2 to criticise the gendered and gendering labelling of them based on their marital status and to regain their agency in choosing between work and marriage. Enlisting the support of the King/government in #1 was utilised mostly by female tweeps to ask for their rights to be gradually regained whereas some tweeps considered these institutions as the protectors of patriarchy. In #2, however, it was male tweeps who requested the King/government to find solutions for their financial problems of unemployment and low income or put a limit to the soaring dowries in marriage.

Female contributors emphasised the influence of practices and stereotypes that subordinate them in #1 to reject the hierarchical structure imposed on them while #2 was rich in these depictions of women as lacking, irrational, or shallow within male tweeps' contributions to keep them in the domestic sphere. Many descriptions that objectify women were found drawing on metaphors taken from consumerist and economic discourses, e.g. in terms of 'price' and 'value'. War-based metaphors and topoi of threat

or catastrophe were used to magnify the extent of *9anis*-hood as a social problem to build later (de)legitimations on. Religious discourse was more prominent in the discourse of male tweeps in the two threads, to legitimate the need for mahram in #1 and polygamy in #2 or delegitimize high dowries and other unnecessary marriage requests.

In contrast, meta-discourse was more prevalent in the discourse of female tweeps to highlight the gendered and gendering aspect of the social-shared mainstream narrative of them and reject the discrimination against them based on biological sex, i.e. their singularisation with the travel controls and the pejorative term '*9anis*'. Based on arguments such as these, they engaged in redefinitions of maleness and femaleness, generalising the concepts of controls and *9anis*-hood to men because of the popularised consequences of Saudi men's unrestricted travel and the phenomenon of homosexuality which blur the gender division and destabilise the stereotype of women as irrational. The discrimination against women was, thus, portrayed as a manifestation of a masculine structure's fear of women 'winning', a fear that is no longer appropriate for the expansive socio-economic roles granted to women in the present fast-developing SA.

The patterns surfacing at the discourse and strategy level in the arguments of anti-change contributors in both hashtags revealed that they were reiterating mainstream conceptualisations of guardianship as protection; women as domestic, lacking, etc., and marriage as important to women. They were dismantling opponent arguments by silencing, disowning, and casting doubt on the intentions and morality of women as well as their supporters who participate in the hashtags to call for their liberties or claim enslavement. This was done to misalign with their ideology which is seen as opposing the teachings of religion itself and it revealed an overdetermination of women as symbols of the country's religious way of life. The focus on women's issues in hashtags was associated with liberalism and foreign agendas. The liberal men were described as hypocrites who seek access to non-*maHram* women while, at the same time, restricting women in their houses. Fear was commonly incited in various ways to caution against giving women the right to unrestricted travel or leaving them unmarried.

The pro-change group, nonetheless, engaged in undermining mainstream ideas and binarisms that draw on culture and religion by showing contradictions, e.g. women raise their children to become their *mahrms* or that travel controls do not apply to homosexuals simply because they are privileged to have the male organ. Also, they highlighted the lack of consensus regarding the presence and permission of *maHram* in

religion, that guardianship could lead to conflict and abuse, and that the travel conditions of the past and the present are vastly different. They misaligned with the status quo and its defenders as well as the singularisation of/discrimination against women by suggestions like escaping the country or to giving up their Saudi nationality or by dismissing the present hashtags as reflective of a masculine mentality that is damaging to women. SA was depicted in their arguments as a masculinised State with its own strict version of the religion, often associated with radicalism/extremism and a sexist fear of women's liberty. They demonstrated a great awareness of rhetoric that aims to subdue or manipulate them. For transformation, they mocked the social practices of polarisation and stereotyping by pointing to the expansion of Saudi women's guardians, when in conflict with her original guardian, and the transfer of custody that travel or marriage then would involve. They often emphasised the positive consequences of establishing policies that empower women as they redefined females as just a different form of being human with equal rights, of mobility or marriage, and responsibilities. Thus, some of them foregrounded Saudi women's achievements nationally and internationally, celebrated progress, even if slow or minimal, or called for generalising the label of *9anis*-hood and travel controls for men and homosexuals.

Such distribution of macro-strategies amongst anti-change and pro-change tweeps on the perpetuation-dismantling-transformation spectrum agree with their goal orientation within the Saudi online sphere. The length of the sections under each stance reflected how much effort was exerted in each. Fewer anti-change tweeps exhibited a desire to dismantle their opponents' arguments or resist change. They spent more online space and energy reinforcing existing gendered patterns in the social system, defending the status quo and painting an unpleasant portrait of change. The rich nuances of the pro-change strategies, however, mirrored the eagerness of many hashtag contributors to instigate change, but that they exerted more effort contesting existing patterns (directly or indirectly) – pro-change 'dismantling' was the richest strategy in Chapter 6 – than they did on positive self-presentation (for women) and on portraying change as a positive object.

Because the transformation of any aspect of the status quo starts by changing the rhetoric surrounding it, this was evident in the discourse of pro-change tweeps taking various forms, e.g. by re-appropriating and dismantling dominant stereotypes and discourses that are degrading or damaging to women, elaborating on the legitimating religious interpretations that drive them, spreading pro-change discourses of humanity,



accountability, independence, equality, and justice. Some tweeps casted doubts on various normative social-role expectations and practices and showed signs of rethinking processes of gender definitions/expectations and mainstream interpretations of canonical texts. Many of the arguments found in conservative posts, which presented socially-shared views and religious claims to ensure acceptance of their oppositional stance, were deconstructed to reveal contradictions in Islamic teachings and principles, thus, representing the possibility of multiple readings and interpretations of religious scripts, which were often quoted to restrict women. This helped to curtail the holy aura often given to prominent religious figures and their interpretations and *fatwas*, which can lead to a repositioning of their role in society in a way that allows people to adopt different 'valid' interpretations of these texts.

The online discourse studied in the analysis chapters highlighted the existence of competing ideologies within the socio-political context of SA evaluating the status quo and change, gender identity and power relations, and revising mainstream interpretations of religious texts. Speaking of 'women' and 'men' in totalizing terms has previously been revealed problematic (Lazar, 2007). As a social category, gender intersects with other categories of social identity, including age, ethnicity, social class and position, and geographical location. Patriarchy as an ideological system also interacts in complex ways with, for instance, religious, economic, or consumerist ideologies. The workings of gender ideology as well as asymmetrical power relations and resistance to them in the online discourse in hashtag debates about Saudi women's issues are presently assuming quite subtle forms. The social status quo in SA was often contested in support of a humanist vision of an unbiased society. As a social category that is significant to the human kind around the world, in which the social category of gender does not overdetermine the relationships with others.

To sum up, this thesis has demonstrated that the majority of male and female tweeps collaborated by joining various pieces of the puzzle (relating to the situation of women in SA) to form an emerging collective, yet subtle, 'feminist' movement aimed at gradually breaking down patriarchal structures. By initiating progressive discourses and rationalising mainstream ones, a slow change may be effected without confrontation or affiliation with a Western feminism due to the negative connotations attached to it as a result of the post feminism backlash (Lazar, 2007) and the circulated images of it on paper and digital media outlets, some of which do not fit with the Islamic values and principles

practised in SA. The complexity of Saudi women's struggle for their rights, as the type of feminism spoken of in this thesis, stems from the intertwining between the significance of religion to the Saudis and the cultural/tribal traditions deeply-rooted in the Arabian Peninsula.

## **7.2 Answering RQs**

### **7.2.1 What broad discourses and underlying social constructions are drawn upon by contributors to the selected women-related hashtag debates about Saudi women? What interdiscursive links exist between them, and how are they used to reveal ideological positioning?**

As argued in Chapter 3, the interplay of traditional and subversive discourses may lead to the modification of cultural practices, values, and beliefs, that is to social change (de Certeau, 1984 [1980]). Chapter 5:Chapter 5 sought to uncover, and aggregate patterns of the stories men and women tell of themselves or each other so that they have the option to adopt other ways of describing themselves or their situations, within the same platform or across online platforms. The investigation was conducted based on the assumption that discourse communicates existing socially-shared representations and constructions and that the discursive recontextualisation of cultural practices or discourses involves possibly bending social systems while being governed by them to invoke change or reconfigure cultural practices in the status quo (ibid). The investigated online debates revealed the existence of divergent and opposing positions, ranging from those that reinforce traditional conservative traditions to those more progressive ones. They show that dissenting voices co-existed with mainstream anti-change voices because tweeps were offering challenging, or confrontational models of gendered identities. Such multiplicity of positions was an anticipated outcome considering the changes that SA is undergoing recently to 'empower' women.

This study has shown that the problem with women's situation is not only institutional, but also conceptual and discursive as reflected in the researched debates. Progress in women's conditions is tangled up in an existing 'wider' ideological conflict, given the view of them as symbols of the religious and conservative identity of the Saudi nation, an overdetermination consistently noted by other scholars previously, e.g. AlRasheed (2013), Almaghlouth (2017), and Altoaimy (2017). The issues extended

beyond women's travel without consent or labelling them as *9anises* to the deliberation of mainstream ideologies and power dynamics that have historically framed their situation. The hashtags were manipulated as tools to support the same oppositional or adaptive arguments presented in heavily-negotiated and highly confrontational topics as women driving (Almaghlouth, 2017; Almahmoud, 2015; Altoaimy, 2017; Chaudhry, 2014) and the removal of guardianship, which is currently attracting much scholarly attention.

The results demonstrated that contributors recognise the presence and power of patriarchy in various aspects of their lives. They appeared to dabble with conflicting desires for social equality and anxiety about how it might disrupt the social conditions they are used to. There was a struggle of who gets authority, keeps authority, and in what ways it troubles them. Some tweeps engaged in negotiating the social origins of discourses they considered unjust or damaging to women, e.g. travel controls and *9anis*-hood, shifting the responsibility for their social legitimacy from religion to masculinised traditions and policies. This supports previous findings that patriarchy is reflected online (Almaghlouth, 2017; Madini and de Nooy, 2013) but is being challenged and (re)defined discursively due to the modern-day 'globalisation of identities' (Yamani, 2000).

The network of gender-difference D/discourses put together in this thesis was presented in a typology based on the frequency of their occurrence in the data. I have drawn attention to various intertextual and interdiscursive links invoked to co-construct the gendered discourses and shown whether they have been utilised by hashtaggers to confirm or contest the embedded gender constructions. The links made between them as they were reproduced were informative of and informed by the stance they were framed to serve within the conservation-progression spectrum. It is important to acknowledge that most of the normative social constructions in the Saudi context were found through the perpetuating discourse of the conservatives but were also present in competing stances.

A Discourse of Patriarchy was part of the apparatus with which conservatives perpetuated traditional gender distinctions, roles, and relationships (Sunderland, 2004), which is why its indexed authority required constant reaffirmation of masculinity (Butler, 1990). The over-arching Discourse of Patriarchy includes discourses about SA as masculine society, male dominance represented in the guardianship rule, and the subordination of women. A masculine hegemonic practice draws its power from consent

by convincing women of its legitimacy (Fairclough, 2001:232). The data has revealed common descriptions of men as responsible for women and of women as the responsibility of their guardians. A discourse of guardian-as-protection was highlighted similarly by Almujaivel (2017) and Altoaimy (2017). Men are trapped in the social story of them as protectors and representatives of women, and women as queens or gems that need protection and as nurturers in nuclear and extended families yet described as irrational beings/sources of seduction that need to be controlled and guided. Although it was expected that contemporary online discussions would challenge typical gender stereotypes and role allocations, traces of gendered discourses surfaced from within progressive discourses that relied on dismantling and transformative strategies to undermine patriarchal restrictions while contravening them with calls for women to regain the right of independent choice of travel or marriage. Hence, the current patriarchal structure is ‘struggling’ to keep its grip, despite being supported by cultural or religious rhetoric.

These dominant discourses are so binding to men and women in ways that prevent them from constructing meanings beyond their pre-assigned roles. The Saudi society subject-positions women by the labels: daughter, sister, mother, wife or *9anis*, and good or bad. Women who demand their rights, including free mobility, were associated with immorality, describing a sexist view of women. As the dialogue between these discourses confirms in #1, the concept of *maHram*, when equated with the social institution of *wali amr*, is a hegemonic practice that is supported by loose religious interpretations of Islamic texts and influenced by deeply-rooted patriarchal practices deeply-rooted in SA. *9anis*-hood in #2 was naturalised and explained by existing percentages of men and women, not allowing women to marry foreigners, men’s unemployment or low income, *wali amr*’s conditions, financial independence of women, etc. All these discourses, with the exception of the latter, de-agentialise women.

A discourse of ‘victimisation’, which I prefer to call ‘subordination<sup>6</sup>’, was used to move away from an explicit expression of antagonism to the current patriarchal order, which is reflected in/a reflection of the custodianship rule of the King in the country. A humane rhetoric that is less confrontational was also invoked. Echoing the findings of

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<sup>6</sup>Victimisation ascribes lack of agency to women, which is not the case in SA.

Altoaimy (2017), venting frustration through emphasis on lack of power and guardians' control or abuse of power, and the consequences of such power imbalance on familial and marital relationships were resources to topple patriarchal concepts based on the need to protect women's modesty or safety. It was interesting to see that progressive self-reported female tweeps associated 'conservation' with everything masculine, which could be perceived as an outcome of the gender segregation and concealment of women practised in the country. Criticism of male hegemony was extended to all men through negative-other representation focusing on their behaviour abroad or their acclaimed 'incompatibility' within marriage. Policymakers and the religious establishment were held responsible for the current conditions suffered by women, which reveals the level of awareness of powerful forces shaping their situation. Saudi women are caught up in a situation where they feel the need to take into consideration the powerful role male figures in their families play, whether they were supportive or abusive, before they fight for their rights. Using pseudonyms online has enabled them to overcome the fear of bringing shame to their families and the stigma of communicating with the other sex.

Because of its relevance to the national identity of the Saudis (Yamani, 2000:134), it was expected that the influence of religious discourse would be dominant in the arguments of either ideological groups, as it did in Almahmoud (2015), Altoaimy (2017), and Sahly (2016), but in the present 2000 tweets sample, it was not as pervasive as expected in patriarchal discourses based on counts of discursive traces, c.f. Section 0. Money-related discourses were also used as justifications to support men's requests for change in the conditions of marriage or for financial support from the government. A discourse of sexuality was at play where definitions or redefinitions of gender were presented, and the gender divisions of male/man or female/woman was blurred. Also, historical discourse was present where *Sahwa* was indexed as the cause of 'deterioration' in the situation of Saudi women since the movement started or where the controls were delegitimated as caused by an incident within the House of Saud. Such interdiscursive traces can impact the production and reception of the posts that contain them.

Similar discourses were invoked by pro-change tweeps to problematise women's issues and justify the need for change or women's equal human right based on a Discourse of Gender Equality. The aim was to challenge established cultural norms and disrupt the continuity of socially-ascribed gender roles and representations. At the same time, maintaining allegiance to the State and hailing the support of policymakers to adopt

gradation, while subverting social norms with top-down policy changes to grant women the rights of mobility and marriage (or not). This enlisting of ‘the state’s authority’ against conservative voices was a strategy documented in debates about women driving by pro-driving supporters in Altoaimy (2017:194-5). Authority was considered a ‘mediator between the religious establishment, society, and women’s demands for reducing gender equality’.

Overall, these gendered discourses show that changes in the Saudi scene in favour of women are possible; however attitudinal/ideological change is more complex. The question remains open for future research with similar aims to compare how social and policy changes in SA are reflected online to the findings of the present research to find out whether it is counter-effective that the arguments, legitimations, definitions, and explanations that closely mirror damaging/unwanted gendered discourses are reproduced and re-appropriated, even when utilised for subversive ends. For the situation of Saudi women to improve, the supporting parties need to be made aware of the power these discourses have. Still, by continuing to find damaging discourses that tend to trap women and giving conscious instruction to new generations on identifying and deconstructing them, they may be able to transform existing discourses and provide alternative language sets and discourses to discuss discrimination-related issues. This direction allows members of the society to reinvent themselves and changes their approach to problems, which increases the potentiality of gradual social change.

While discourses retain a disciplinary power over the people exposed to them, there is also the sense that these discourses have been selected and/or amalgamated to consciously tell the story of the lives of the sampled women-related hashtags’ contributors. Dialoguing with these discourses helps them to retain a sense of agency as well as grants them continuity of and control over self-narratives. One can construct subjectivity with a certain degree of awareness and creativity. The power of active awareness of being voluntarily or involuntarily exposed to these gendered discourses opens up the potential for initiating alternative ways for viewing social actors. Imagining the possibilities for change as a sort of ‘linguistic intervention’ needs to be recognised and popularised (Sunderland, 2004). The stories related in my samples were presented from various perspectives, for example gender was encoded in multiple ways in the tweets, but it still comes out as much more than a simplistic binary or reductive story of femininity/masculinity/liberation/victimisation, reflecting the heterogeneity of subjects

of De Certeau ([1980] 1984). Several gender stereotypes were also overtly recycled, challenged, and disturbed. Other questions remain unsettled, not least whether the hashtag audiences would agree with my readings and co-construct the same set of discourses.

Having demonstrated interdiscursivity with the socially-shared broader discourses, the starting point of this thesis that hashtags are important sites reflecting current conflicting ideologies about Saudi women's rights was illustrated. It also confirms Butler's (1990) proposition that the subversion of gendered practices in a certain social context ought to draw on the discourses and social constructions that shaped them. This is strategic because the deliberated gendered roles and practices needed to be recontextualised within the normative discourses and practices that legitimated them. It is worthy to note that, pragmatically speaking, this means that there is little variety in the discourses that were employed for various functions in the debates as they constitute the 'shared knowledge' that allows communication to be successful (van Dijk, 2006). Indeed, in the 140-characters of a tweet<sup>7</sup>, a few means can serve several ends.

### **7.2.2 What discursive strategies are used by the hashtag samples' contributors for the perpetuation, subversion, or disruption of prevalent discourses and gendered subject positions? And how are they linguistically realised?**

While (co-)constructing, perpetuating, dismantling, or transforming existing 'sexist' prejudices, multi-layered discursive strategies were identified. The works of Reisigl and Wodak (2001), Wodak, et al. (2009), and van Leeuwen (2008) have informed the identification and patterning of the discursive strategies in Chapter 6. They shed light on the 'hybrid' gendered identity formations in SA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whereas Altoaimy (2017) focused on the thematic aspect and the referential/predicational and legitimacy strategies of pro-driving and anti-driving camps in the women-driving debate, this thesis has revealed a wider range of strategies and their means of realisation. Conservative tweeps were found to engage with perpetuating the conditions of the status quo and dismantling any potential change whereas the progressive tweeps engaged with dismantling the status quo and promoting its transformation to achieve progress in the situation of women. Such distribution of these macro-strategies is suitable to the desired outcome of each group.

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<sup>7</sup>This was before the tweet size was doubled towards the end of 2017

The macro-strategy of perpetuation was employed by anti-change tweeps through reiterating existing social-actor representations, stereotyping and polarisation, or adding legitimations. The first two meso-strategies were realised with means such as categorisation, homogenising/metonymical nouns/pronouns, physical/relational identifications, functionalisation, negative-other presentation, possessivation, metaphors, emphasis on differentiation or assimilation, opposition, and analogies. Legitimation was achieved through negation, shifts to MSA, drawing from religious discourse, negation, hyperboles, metaphors, or various topoi of problem, burden, catastrophe, or threat. While these tweeps engaged in propagating their conservative stance and defending the status quo, they also attempted to dismantle opposing groups and arguments. They did so by discrediting them through negative association to liberal/foreign agendas, disparagement, topos of danger/threat to resist the heteronomisation of the Saudi society, and strategies of intensification (using emojis, punctuation marks, shifts to MSA or English script, hyperbolic metaphors, or asking questions) or mitigation (through nominalisation and passivation of actions/requests from policymakers).

In contrast, pro-change tweeps engaged in dismantling the status quo through disrupting/re-appropriating gendered representations of social actors and discriminatory practices, delegitimizing their anti-change opponents or their arguments, including their singularisation of women, intensification to highlight the subordination and the injustice of their situation or the urgency for change in that respect, and mitigation strategies to soften the effect of their denunciation of status quo, policymakers, or men in general. These strategies manifested linguistically and rhetorically in re-appropriations of traditional representations and metaphors, vague generalisations, cursing, emojis, repetition, negative evaluations, juxtaposition, negation, comparison, fictitious dialogue/scenarios and topoi of history, burden, or terrible place, and pointing to inconsistencies. Little appraisements for women were found. These arguments were intensified using hyperboles, emojis, mock suggestions, oath assertions, shifts to MSA, exaggerations or repetition, and mitigated also with emojis, irony, ellipsis, nominalisation/passivation, vague pronouns, impersonalisation or negation. For transformation, these tweeps invoked humour through sarcasm, laughter, aphorisms (or inversions of them), personal anecdotes/scenarios, hyperbolic mock suggestions using hashtags, and parodies. They used similar means in addition to topoi of difference/comparison between past and present times, change, progress, and



consequence drawing on rhetorical questions combined with derogatory evaluations of the status quo to disrupt it and promote change.

The employed ideological functions of referential and predicational strategies derive from reiterated or challenged depictions of six social actors that were invoked in the discussions. These actors were depicted variably, e.g. decision makers (protector of patriarchy/supporter for women and modernisation), government representatives and religious authorities, (authoritative/originators of unjust laws/embodying a ‘radical’ contempt for women), and the polarised social groups of men (good/bad *maHrams*) vs. women (compliant/victimised), conservatives (defendants of status quo/radical) vs. progressive (liberal/immoral/agenda mongers).

Such emphasis on similarity or difference for polarisation resulted in conflicting constructions of identities, individual or social, as contributors rationalised and relativised their stance (Wodak et al., 2009). Each social group engaged in framing the other negative evaluations. While progressives never associated themselves with foreign groups, they were discredited by conservatives through associating them with foreign intrusive forces and such representation has engendered discourses that do not draw on Islamic principles, rather on the need for resisting Western intrusion (Arebi, 1994). Progressives, however, subverted it by associating anti-change mentality with *Daesh*/militant/extreme religious ideologues. The clash between conservatives and progressives over various issues has been resolved on the ground by a commitment on the part of both parties to keep the peace by following institutional laws alongside a rejection to engage/associate with outright feminist, or extremist, agendas because of the stigma attributed to both.

The way the relevant actors were constructed within this polarising discourse, projects ideologies underlying the prevalent negative-other presentation and were used for ‘assimilation’ or ‘differentiation’ (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Similarity was emphasised to construct expectations from the government, embodied by the King, to make direct and indirect criticism of and/or requests while expressing multiple ideological positions, e.g. to lift the travel controls, remove guardianship rule, or financially facilitate (polygamous) marriage because the subordination of women was depicted as ‘enclosure’ and *9anis*-hood was viewed as a social ‘catastrophe’ that needs urgent addressing. The use of spatial references through deictics and toponyms, e.g. ‘here’, ‘in Saudi’, or ‘in this country’ was common to stress the autonomy of the Saudi society.

Anti-change tweeps were often negatively-represented with emphasis on abuse of guardianship, their scandalous behaviour abroad, or their incompetent ‘dated’ mentality for the Saudi women of today. Women, however, were represented as subjected to the control of others by distilling such qualities as ‘irrationality/seductiveness/superfluity/vulnerability’ to them. Pronounced are the labels of the metaphorical labels of ‘queen’ and ‘lacking in mind’, ‘irrational’, or ‘moral/immoral’, or the domesticating polarisation of ‘wife/*9anis*’, all of which are aimed at limiting women. In their struggle with the structured domestication of women and their subordination ‘under’ male superiority, pro-change tweeps were drawing heavily on conservative representations in a subversive manner to allow their readers to rethink them and the power dynamics they stand for. They demonstrated an ability to identify damaging discourses to a large portion of the Saudi society, women, as well as their influence on framing the identities of Saudi men/women as husbands/wives, fathers/mothers, etc. They portrayed a misogynist image of conservative depictions of women, by reiterating objectifying and animalising metaphors and analogies.

### **7.2.3 To what extent does Twitter as an (inter)discursive space have a transformative potential in facilitating social change in favour of women in SA?**

After aggregate findings were explained by highlighting the underlying dominant discourses that drive mainstream behavioural patterns within the social context and alternative discourses challenging them were accentuated. These explanations helped to understand the present nature, history, and future prospect of the male hegemony that exists in the Saudi gender situation, which makes it possible to propose solutions to the hegemonic practices. Solutions may be as simple as pointing to the presence, or lack, of diversity in the Saudi Twitter-sphere and embracing more diverse voices and competing discourses and ideologies.

The multiple perspectives emphasised in Chapters 5 and 6 is in line with previous propositions that the internet has provided a ‘social space for dissenting voices’ of individuals and marginalised groups (Sheyholislami, 2011:37) to have a dialectal relationship with dominant voices. This thesis showcased how Twitter hashtags as interactive tools attract interested people (Gillen and Merchant, 2013; Honeycutt and Herring, 2009; Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2015). They can position users in conversation

about a topic (Page, 2012), although they are not directly talking with or to each other about it. It has revealed that users are aware of the presence of an ‘imagined’ audience and different/like-minded tweeps (Anderson, 2006; Pavalanathan and Eisenstein, 2015). Therefore, they constitute inclusive interdiscursive spaces where men and women have experimented with reinventing their identities within a spectrum of conservative-progressive ways.

Expression on Twitter is mediated by its interface, which shapes how users can utilise certain affordances to make conscious or unconscious language choices that help them overcome social/technical constraints (Evans, 2016; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). This study indicates that Twitter’s features are re-appropriated for this type of public activism and linguistic/social intervention because a link between these mediating features and the communicative activities they enable can be made. They are used as resources for social/individual identity construction, the creation of knowledge, embodying real-life experiences of people. The Saudis intentionally employ hashtags as a virtual medium of discourse and it becomes part of the messages they disseminate. Although the anonymity feature had a liberating effect for women, generalisations about the ‘democratising/equalising’ effect of Twitter could not be made because of regulations in effect in SA controlling electronic media use and criminalising sensitive or antagonistic material, the ease of tracing users to their doors, and the unrepresentativeness of the samples.

The ability to deduce the gender of tweeps in this study has demonstrated that Twitter-based discursive practices were manipulated for gender disclosure and that many tweeps used ‘gendered’ names – whether proclaimed or real is beyond the scope of this study. This self-presentation complicated the binary opposition plaguing the conceptualisation of gender in SA and flouted the affordance of the anonymity feature, demonstrating intentionality in breaking the established norm of segregation online. As demonstrated in the analysis chapters, emojis had more ‘pragmatic’ functions beyond the expression of emotion as ‘contextualisation cues’, e.g. marking silencing, sarcasm, intensification, flirtatiousness, evaluations, sequence, or deictic references.

The previously-presented complex patterning of discourses attests to the effect of hyperlinked and non-hyperlinked interdiscursivity within tweets in proliferating online social activism and stance taking. Due to the hyperlinked nature of hashtags, the findings demonstrated that they readily lend themselves to the function of linking women-related

issues together or to express viewpoints, e.g. #RemovalOfGuardianshipRule and #Liberal. Interdiscursivity and intertextuality were also evident through references to main actors, e.g. King Salman, to events, e.g. *Sahwa* (awakening), evocations, e.g. F\*\*\*\*\* or #SuhailaBinAbideen, and the marked or unmarked recontextualisations of religious texts or the main arguments of opponents, or through negative-other presentation. These two features have helped to demonstrate the inherent multiplicity of voices and the plurality of discourses found in the tweets under study.

Twitter has played a major role as a ‘mechanism for empowerment’ for Saudi women (Samin, 2008:207), amplifying their voices and enabling them to exercise ‘moments of agency’ that was not possible for them earlier (de Certeau, [1980]1984). The ‘power of presence’, asserted by Saudi women, affirms their awareness of their rights, and, hence, can transform power dynamics (Bayat, 2007). This is paramount in the implementation of social change (Talbot, 2010). It forms part of a collective, yet subtle, ‘feminist’ movement to break down patriarchal structures to effect slow change (Castells, 2015). By the discursive strategies illustrated in RQ2, gender roles were being redefined, arguments that decentralise the authority of religious interpretations were presented, and ‘other’ interpretations and opinions not likely found on mainstream media were mediated. This was a finding Almaghlouth (2017) argued for as well.

Experimenting with progressive identification of the self, in ways possibly alien to the Saudi context, may be supported by the technical provisions of Twitter and hashtags as spaces of public interaction with other, possibly veiled, women and members of the other sex. This has made hashtags ideal spaces to investigate discursive contradictions and inconsistencies that are typical of contexts of transformation at a time of changing gender affairs in SA (Oostendorp and Jones, 2015). Such utilisation is in line with an instrumental ideology of language, online and/or offline, as a symbolic resource that people draw from to build distinctive personae (Herring and Paolillo, 2006; Talbot, 2010).

Overall, the data in this thesis has showcased the role of Twitter, with its affordance of anonymity, flexibility, brevity, and public outreach, in providing a ‘safe’ (inter)discursive space, where women and their supporters from the other sex can voice their opinions and explicate their conditions from various perspectives. The projection of multiple perspectives on the status quo/change was permitted online by allowing for the transcendence of strict cultural norms and gender-segregation constraints.

Sunderland's (2004) discourse identification approach has helped to find various discourses at work in Chapter 5, and the analytical categories drawn from the SAA and DHA models in Chapter 6 have proved appropriate for understanding the discursive strategies and the discursive 'craft' and 'creativity' in the tweeps' competence and intimate knowledge of both the technological and social contexts at hand (Jones, 2010).

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### 8.1 Summary of findings

The purpose of this research was to examine gender related representations through analysis of two controversial Twitter hashtags topics in SA collected in June 2015: travel restrictions for Saudi women, #ضوابط\_سفر\_المرأة\_السعودية (#NewTravelControlsForSaudiWomen), and a percentage of Saudi *9anises* #ثلث\_السعديات\_عوانس (#OneThirdofSaudiWomenAre9anises). The samples were analysed through CDA examination of social change and ideological struggles surrounding it. The analysis covered various contextualising features including the distribution of self-proclaimed male and female tweeps, their language choice as well as the use of technical features of Twitter for self-presentation, stance taking, and gender disclosure, followed by an exploration of the discursive strategies creatively involved in arguing change. The findings have demonstrated that the sampled women-related discussions reflect a wider ideological conversation about change.

The hashtagged interactions reflected a wider ideological conflict and a general focus on issues pertaining to women in SA. This thesis advances an already-existing conversation promoting the role of Twitter as an interdiscursive space in ‘broadcasting’ a multitude of voices that assume various ideological positions within reproductions of existing discourses, competing discourses, and the imagining of alternative realities that can go beyond the confines of the platform. The importance of these online conversations lies in that they were not possible on mainstream media or within institutions due to sex-segregation laws and male hegemony. While tweeps promoted their position, on the conversation-progression continuum, resistance from opposing voices was expected, their arguments anticipated, and responded to, evidencing the dialogism and multi-locations found in the data.

On the one hand, anti-change contributors expressed a conservative stance against change in women’s affairs by perpetuating a Discourse of Patriarchy and the underlying stereotypes of women as domestic, out of control, seductive, demanding, and vulnerable. They reiterated a view of women as symbols of the nation’s religious values as they focused on legitimating the status quo, depicting and intensifying threats a change can bring to their conservative way of life, and delegitimizing their opponents’ arguments. On the other hand, pro-change tweeps employed creative dismantling and transformative

strategies aimed at delegitimizing the stereotyping and overdetermination of women's social role, while making analogies, re-appropriating established metaphors, e.g. the queen, and aphorisms, and exposing discontinuities that expose social or structural incongruities to disrupt existing discriminatory practices. Dissent and a desire for change were expressed by emphasising the consequences of male hegemony and the subordinate status of women while incorporating a Discourse of Gender Equality. The need for change was rationalised drawing on various argumentation schemes to transform the patriarchal social order.

That these ideological groups mutually drew on central patriarchal discourses reveals that these constructions are ingrained within the society supported by the dominant interpretation of religious teachings and government policies. Progressive tweeps showed great awareness of the workings of these discourses and legitimacy practices. Interdiscursivity with other peripheral discourses was documented, including a religious discourse, a discourse of sexuality, and meta-discourses about hashtags/hashtagging/keywords. Hashtags were also used as hyperlinked tools for enlisting authorities into the argument or link to other relevant issues/requests/evaluations. Thereof, this thesis has supported the argument on the transformative potential of Twitter based on its provision of a space where ideological struggles can be advanced, resulting in a slow social transformation.

## **8.2 Contribution of the study**

This thesis proposes contribution to scholarly work in Arabic in the fields of CDA, gender and discourse, and social media, which can have wider implications to social media, journalism, translation and language, and policy planning. CDA aims to draw attention to hidden ideologies in a text and not just settle with the 'tip of the ideological iceberg' (van Dijk, 1997) and show how stereotypes are used to generalise or blur facts. Creating sensitivity to misinformation, misrepresentation, and manipulation is conducive to fostering a balanced society where power is distributed fairly. It contributes to research on gender and discourse by showing how, within an essentially segregated context, gendered identities and relations may be contested and negotiated in dynamic and creative ways afforded by Twitter. It also contributes to a conceptualisation of the 'discursive struggle' (Grant and Hardy, 2003), i.e. struggles over meaning where a complex 'process of synthesis' (Kwon et al., 2014) can mediate language use and collective understanding.

The polarised construction of gender identity was reflected in tweeps' engagement with inclusionary and exclusionary practices to show affiliation with one side or the other.

Furthermore, this thesis constitutes a scholarly effort to respond to the oft-invoked representation of Saudi women, men, and families as homogeneous in Western media by highlighting the multi-perspectiveness found within the Saudi society. Such focus on the presence of multiple voices and hybrid identities helps to demystify the polarisation or homogenising representations of social actors can be a stepping stone for future studies in SA and the ME regarding the semantic ideological potentials of Arabic discourse in manufacturing, sustaining and disseminating existing or 'imagined' social realities. This makes the critical skill of noticing bias and stereotyping practices in discourse a pressing need in the ME against the scarcity of critical research in the region.

Lastly, this study has provided basis for the social significance of Twitter as an (inter)discursive tool for social activism. It illustrated the extent to which it has helped to extend the deliberation of such heavily-debated social phenomena in SA represented in multiple voices and positions. Such diversity has dismantled the view of Saudi women as passive/voice-less.

### **8.3 Implications of the Study**

Having established earlier that the way feminism is re-contextualised in various ME countries is a phenomenon worth studying, the present thesis demonstrated that online debates within the Saudi context espouse a unique form of feminism. There is evidence that Twitter has provided women access to a public space that was otherwise inaccessible. By projecting themselves as powerful and asserting their presence online, they have established a subtle movement in hashtagged debates and allied partial cultural support. Directions to social change manifested within and through this movement, such as the recent lifting of the driving ban, have their political and judicial implications on the long run, which will result in shifting existing power. However, these shifts are slowed down by the fact that women's rights are caught up in wider ideological struggles, e.g. between religious and political groups, namely the conservatives and liberals or the country's religious identity and Westernisation.

This thesis assumes a conceptualisation of these ideological conflicts as complex 'discursive struggles', that can lead to 'other' new possibilities for women. The findings have shown that broad socially-constructed discourses, which were transmitted from the



patriarchal social order to the debates online, can be re-negotiated, re-conceptualised, and (dis)agreed upon when the marginalised status of Saudi women was discussed among groups with diverse ideological positions. Through a range of linguistic and tropological resources, exposing patriarchal patterns can stimulate aware and skilful influencers who aim to ‘engineer’ social change can benefit from such scholarly insights about creative (inter)discursive strategies and possess the sensitivity to prevent any potential abuse of their power by opposing group of actors.

Other implications to the fields of translation, journalism, and policymaking may be worth mentioning. Political, social, and ideological factors must be considered to fully render a message to the target language and for journalists to give justice to human subjects in their journalistic activities about contexts they are not well-versed in. They need to be sensitive to their individual and cultural biases. Language planning and government policies can benefit from the present CDA study, which reflects on such issues as identity, ideology, patriarchal norms and practices, hegemony, or dominance in detail. Patterns found in the discourse of a ‘community’ can help predict movements that may cause subtle variations or major social changes. This leads to a need to reconsider standard definitions in the social sciences of what a ‘community’ is due to the different layers of communities existing on Twitter (the personal level, i.e. family, friends, followers, the community level, i.e. hashtag audience, or transnational level, i.e. the Twitter community across states) and similarly in other SM platforms where youthful communications migrate online.

#### **8.4 Limitations of the Study**

Since transparency is key in social research, many precautions were taken to ensure the maximum validity of the data and justifications for practical decisions which were provided in Chapter 4. This section presents theoretical and methodological limitations that were encountered to inform future research in the field.

First, due to recent changes in Twitter’s policy, it was not possible to find historical data of hashtags using the website’s API except through paid third-party extraction tools. Therefore, the researcher was limited to collecting data provided by the Search option of Twitter’s homepage of a trending hashtag during the time of data collection. Also, some tweets by members with protected accounts were inaccessible based on their profile preferences. How long a hashtag remains trending or whether it continues to be

contributed to is not traceable because of limitations imposed by Twitter. Second, the fact that the studied topics, which were selected from a larger corpus, were stirred by announced news in other media outlets should not be taken to conclude the degree of their importance. Other women issues may have been more crucial to women's lives but were not receiving spiked attention at the time of data collection in 2015 or were not selected for pragmatic reasons. Comparing the two hashtags to other trending topics early in the study had two purposes: 1) to ensure that they are pervasive debates where conflicting opinions can surface; and 2) to overcome the drawbacks of hashtag-based datasets listed by Bruns et al. (2013). That tweeps generally include hashtags intentionally, which presupposes a prior awareness of the existence of these hashtags, was contravened by the fact that such is considered a purposeful discursive strategy in its own right.

Third, the gender of some users was not deducible from their username or the message's content and thus was coded as N/A. They were initially retained to complicate the binary opposition between male-female categories but, because of their small number, they were later removed from analysis to contextualise the interpretation of the comments, the importance of which surfaced during the cross-checking procedure. It was also noticed that some users changed their claimed gender and, hence, the represented gender in the post or the profile at the time of data collection was adopted. Fourth, due to time and word-count limitations, tweets containing other semiotic means that emojis within the two hashtags were not included in the examination. When juggling to tidy and prepare the data using *Excel*, emoticons were lost and had to be manually counted on the initial *Word* file then copied and pasted to the software. Different platforms (e.g. PC vs. Mobile, and IOS, or Android) have varied emoji and emoticon input capabilities, but this variable is not available as meta-data in the dataset.

Furthermore, relations between tweets' responses could not be preserved. Collecting comments of each post was attempted by clicking to open every 'view conversation' link before copying and pasting from the Twitter homepage. This caused much muddle because the hierarchy of messages was lost after pasting, and it was found that some replies contained the hashtag sign, and this resulted in unnecessary repetitions on the document. Moreover, other tagged tweets without the 'view conversation' option showed comments below them. Several contributors post their comments linked together as replies and conversations which added to the confusion. Due to the broad multi-directionality and conversationality of the replies, they could not be fully followed and

were excluded from the data. Those that were captured were separated into another document and may be approached as case studies in future research endeavours.

Although much has changed on Twitter and the practices adopted by hashtag contributors since data collection, this undertaking does not aim to generalise its results or compare gender differences across contexts, just an analysis of two sampled hashtags about Saudi women to compare to patterns that emerged in campaigns about women driving elsewhere. It provides a snapshot of the consistent ideological processes underlying the ongoing discursive discussions exchanged between dominant and resistant voices at a certain point in time. With this aim in mind, the relatively small corpus was effective in this qualitative investigation to explore consistent social patterns and conflicts. It is noteworthy that this has helped avoid the current problem of automated bot messages as it was not as disturbing in 2015 as it is nowadays, raising concerns about the distinction between human ‘twittering’ and programmed bots that have compromised many Twitter datasets lately and skewed results in various ways, e.g. spikes in the mention of ‘Trump’ on Twitter conversations. Saudis are now aware of this use of ‘twitterbots’ by foreign agents to create division nationally and they understand their effect in creating and popularising a certain hashtag or moving public arguments within it to a certain direction.

Additionally, the various models of CDA were approached eclectically according to what is found relevant and salient in the data because incorporating the diverse classifications within them was not feasible nor was it within the scope of the research questions of this thesis. Since gender identity is a context-sensitive construct (Kimmel, 2000), the findings may resonate with members of the Saudi society who are exposed to other cultures as the researcher and the reviewers are. Discourses are interpretative and different discourses or interpretations may be suggested by other analysts because they are subjective and depend on what one finds as ‘salient’ or not-so common sense.

Finally, verification of the revealed patterns offline on social reality is beyond the scope of this study because it requires interview data to be carried out in further studies to extend the findings of this study. The present thesis may be viewed as a preliminary investigation whose findings reveal a more complex picture than the stereotypical binary characterisation of female versus male or the perception of change with a yes or no attitude would allow. It may have some weaknesses and areas that allow for improvement, but its results contribute to research in Arabic on gender and discourse.

## 8.5 Suggestions for future research

The findings of this thesis present a myriad of exciting options for future research. The continued expansion of the hashtagged-tweet genre together with its continued widespread use can provide ample relevant data for future investigations in gender and discourse. Supporting previous findings from corpus-assisted CDA studies (e.g. Almaghlouth, 2017, Altoaimy, 2017), the adopted qualitative analysis was another lens to look at similar data and it can inspire further applications of various CDA tools to the Saudi context and across different discursive platforms, topics, languages, and social groups.

Longitudinal studies may be invited to capture how discourse on SM platforms is variably constructed by or constructive of social structures (Fairclough, 1995) in various contexts, about other topics than those pertaining to women, and at different points in time. Studies of the relationship between the diverse ideological struggles between varied groups, the social problems that motivate them and the advances they look to implement or that result from their activism are invited in discourse studies. There is also potential for an ethnographic study that reaches out to the users with surveys and/or interviews to verify whether these findings hold out in their cognitive and behavioural day-to-day experiences and gain insight into the motivation of using Twitter, alternative platforms, or a certain hashtag rather than another.

Further work is needed to consider the diverse conversation-like interactions that take place between tweeps in the comments below influential tweets, supporting or opposing change, because they differ in structure from the conventional turn-taking forms of daily interactions. It might be worth investigating if the comments section below governmental announcements and influential tweets and how the discourse of different patterns of readers, supporting or opposing, play out in these public interactions. Another area for future research is the semiotic aspect of tweets within hashtags, which could not be tackled within the scope of the present thesis. It would be worthwhile to look at how memes, images, videos, and hyperlinks, may be employed to propagate a certain stance with the Saudi Twitter-sphere.

This thesis has revealed that emojis have more ‘pragmatic’ functions beyond the expression of emotion, e.g. marking derogation, irony, mitigation, intensification, etc. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the various functions of emojis’ use across a variety of mobile communication services and languages, taking into

consideration their highly context-sensitive nature because very little ‘qualitative’ research has been done at the discourse level to capture how they are used in context in ME countries. It would also be worthwhile to carry quantitative and qualitative analyses on the Saudis’ choice of nicknames and usernames across various platforms in combination, perhaps, with interviews to recognise the motivation of choice. It would be particularly thought-provoking to interview those who preferred to use their real names to see if they have common or personality demographic characteristics.

With these recommendations, this thesis thrives on the hope that future research in discourse and gender studies in the Arabic language and/or in the ME can find inspiration from its highlights, methodological applications, or findings.

## **8.6 Final thoughts**

During the course of writing this thesis, the participation of women in the public sphere has increased and the support for change in the situation of Saudi women has gained more acceptance, pioneered by HRH Prince Mohammed Bin Salman in the 2030 vision. Many of the mainstream discourses were undergoing deconstruction and reconstruction and many of the legitimacy discourses were refuted, but this does not mean that resistance to change has become completely silenced, especially now that the most internationally problematised gender issue, i.e. women driving, has been resolved. The purpose of encouraging researchers to continue to notice what discourses are at play in the Saudi society when its members negotiate dilemmas, especially those between the genders and the role of religion within them, reflects the researcher’s desire for the continuation of such dialectic conversations.

Since ideology is prone to subversion no matter how hard-line it is thought to be, the youth’s exposure to diverse arguments in such debates as those presented within this thesis may serve to make deeply-rooted ideologies open for contestation and help them regain agency in choosing what to believe in. Being selective of their beliefs and thoughts will direct what manifests in their lives and what ticks them off domestically or socially. It will give them a space to review the practices they adopt with the self and the other and what ‘hybrid’ gender identity they wish to enact in relation to the other in various contexts and interactions.

The offline reality in the country is showing signs of progress in general and towards giving women back their rights. Hence, the time for change is no longer now; it started

earlier when previous generations of educated Saudi women made it their responsibility to pioneer the change they wished to see and established themselves as equals to men. What Saudi women may want to continue to do during the present phase of changing gender affairs is to keep the conversation going and create alternative discourses about themselves simultaneously to moderate traditional ones for a new era of gender equity.

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