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### "Insta-Tweet" Appeal among Saudi Women: A Uses-and-gratifications Perspective

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Running head: “INSTA-TWEET” APPEAL AMONG SAUDI WOMEN

“Insta-Tweet” Appeal Among Saudi Women:

A Uses-and-Gratifications Perspective

A

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

St. Mary’s University in Partial Fulfillment

For the Degree of

Master of Art

in

Communication Studies

by

Eman Alaslani

San Antonio, Texas

May 2019

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## “INSTA-TWEET” APPEAL AMONG SAUDI WOMEN

### **Abstract**

The emergence of social media has changed many aspects of people’s lives as it directly impacts communication and social conscience. Social media has created new ways of providing information about social issues through peer communication, which plays an important role in user behavior. This study examined the impact of both Twitter and Instagram on Saudi women, and attempted to understand the factors driving women to use Instagram and Twitter and to be involved in social events. In this study, a qualitative method was the primary means of data collection. This study used convenience sampling. Due to limited time for research, the study involved a sample of seven Saudi women. The interviews were conducted in English and, in some cases, Arabic. The themes that emerged from the findings of the interviews: In Twitter, seeking important information, trending topics, giving space to Saudi women, increasing awareness about women rights while in Instagram the common themes were entertainment, self-presentation, Instagram itself, creativity and Saudi women. These themes served to answer the research questions that informed this study.

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# “INSTA-TWEET” APPEAL AMONG SAUDI WOMEN

## “Insta-Tweet” Appeal Among Saudi Women:

### A Uses-and-Gratifications Perspective

#### **Chapter One: Introduction**

The emergence of social media has changed many aspects of people’s lives as it directly impacts communication and social conscience. Social media has created new ways of providing information about social issues through peer communication, which plays an important role in user behavior. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have the highest numbers of interactions with events, which may be performances or social functions focusing on civic or political activism (D’Onfro, 2016). Twitter is offering a new way to communicate with others about social events in the society, and it opens new windows for individuals to analyze and to become involved with these events (Chaudhry, 2014). The uses and gratifications of specific social media have been studied in several works such as understanding the appeal of user-generated media: a uses and gratifications perspective (Shao, 2008), and media use and life satisfaction: The moderating role of social events (Wilczek, 2018). However, no study had yet analyzed the uses and gratifications of these social media among Saudi women. This study will examine the impact of both Twitter and Instagram on Saudi women, and attempt to understand the factors driving women to use Instagram and Twitter and to be involved in social events. As we become aware of the uses and gratifications contributing to the role of Instagram and Twitter for Saudi women, we can apply this knowledge to enhancing the use of social media for these users to advance social justice and gender equality. This will further our understanding of how these media impact behavior and the ability to communicate.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature review begins with general information on social media and Saudi women. Subsequent topics include Instagram, Twitter, Twitter and Arab Spring, social media in Saudi Arabia, the position of Saudi women within Saudi Arabia, and the theoretical background for the study. Finally, research questions and the purpose of this study are presented.

### **Social Media: Overview**

Social media has become an effective vehicle for social communication and social conscience. “Social media” is a popular term used to describe various forms of consumer-generated content (CgC) such as blogs, social network sites, forums, virtual communities, online newspaper reader comments, and media files shared on sites such as YouTube (Salcudean & Muresan, 2016). Through social media, new routes are being developed to provide information on social issues through peer communication, which plays an important role in people’s behavior.

According to Manuel Castells (2012) “mass self-communication provides the technological platform for the construction of the autonomy of the social actor, be it individual or collective.”

When social media emerged, many aspects changed in how the world communicates, connects, and conducts business (Moody, 2010). A great deal of research shows that people are attracted to using social media that support communication functions, and understating this attraction becomes increasingly essential (Quan-Hasse et al., 2002).

In addition to the ease of creating, sharing and editing content on social media, another feature attractive to users is the ability to adjust content and applications. Also, social media promotes the "democratization of information and knowledge" because it “allow[s] for the

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creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Ballard, 2011). Users share ideas, files, and messages, which enables them to evade institutional control of information (Ding & Zhang, 2010).

**Instagram.** Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have the highest number of interactions between users, and this has changed the way that users discover social events and share information about them. The popularity of social media among Internet users creates a new effective way to deal with many social cases. Instagram is an online application enabling users to take photos and videos and share them on other platforms (Frommer, 2010). The main concept of Instagram is to share photographs and videos by using a hashtag (#) (see Figure 1). The network offers a number of special filters allowing users to change the colors and resolutions of the photographs before they post them.

In 2014, Instagram had a 1.53 percent monthly interaction with 150 million users (Social Media, 2014). Instagram reached about 300 million users (Steven Tweedie, 2014). It is currently the fastest growing social network site with more than 600 million active users (Wagner, 2015). Approximately 80 percent of users are outside the United States (Instagram, 2016). Using a daily average, it is estimated that nearly 40 billion pictures were uploaded in 2015 (Instagram, 2016). The popularity of social media among Internet users has the significant effect of raising users’ awareness about social events and issues.

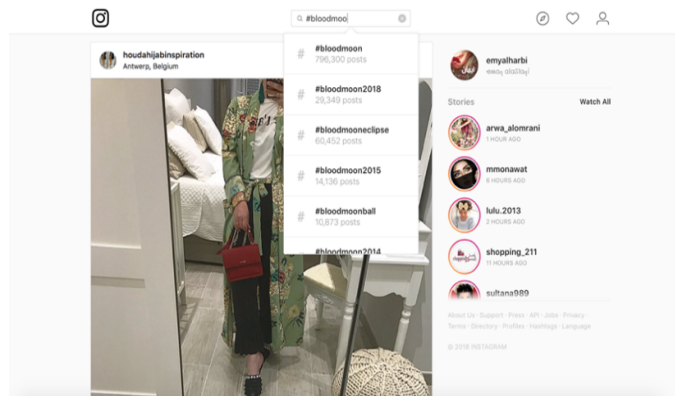


Figure 1. The home page for Instagram application.

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**Twitter.** Today, Twitter is an effective and dynamic way to communicate. Twitter is one of the top-ten visited platforms in the world (Alexi Homepage), and it continues to grow at a rapid rate, acquiring over 300,000 new users every day (Brown, 2010).

Twitter is “powered by people all around the world [and] lets them share and discover what’s happening now” (Twitter.com). This supports McQuail’s (2010) observation that “mass media and society are continually interacting and influencing each other.” Twitter plays an important role to let users discuss international and local news, and it helps them to interact on any topic, analyzing and sharing what is happening around them. Twitter is of “cultural interest (and) fashionable status because of the multiplicity of its functions as a news-gathering and marketing tool” (Ahmad, 2010). However, the various ways of using Twitter makes understanding the uses and gratifications of this specific social media site complicated. Twitter offers a more effective way for "information sharing and for supporting activism and mobilization" than Facebook and other social media platforms (Comunello & Anzera, 2012). Also, due to open Twitter profiles, “Users can both read tweets by users they follow and have access to general discussions through keyword searches known as #hashtags” (see Figure 2) (Comunello & Anzera, 2012) even if they do not follow these users.



Figure 2. The home page for Twitter application.

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### **Twitter and The Arab Spring**

Twitter is one of the most powerful social media platforms. Sharing information in Twitter helps people promote social change. Twitter helps people around the world share all types of information through hashtags and retweets. In 2011, Twitter played a significant role in the Arab Spring movement. It was a useful tool for Tunisian and Egyptian citizens to protest perceived injustices in their revolutions (Chaudhry, 2014).

In early 2011, the term, “Arab Spring” was popular in Western media. The uprising in Tunisia succeeded in ousting then Prime Minister Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. While at that time Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen entered an uncertain transitional period, Syria and Libya were also drawn into a civil conflict (Manfreda, 2017). As a result of the Arab Spring, many countries began to censor access to Internet technology (Chaudhry, 2014). For example, because of the violent protests in Libya, the government severed Internet access and international phone calls (Hill, 2011). Also, in 2011 the Syrian government cut access to the Internet due to the violent protests. In Saudi Arabia, the monarchy issued a decree banning the reporting of news contradicting sharia (Islamic) law, undermining national security, promoting foreign interests, or slandering religious leaders (Freedom House, 2012).

About 13 million Internet users in Saudi citizen access the internet which is equal to 4 percent of the citizen who accesses to the Internet (Middle East Internet Usage Stats, 2013). Nearly 1.9 million Saudi citizens are active on Twitter, making Saudi Arabia the world’s fastest-growing Twitter nation (Bennett, 2013). About 47 percent of all tweets come from Saudi Arabia (Arab Social Media Report, 2013). This huge number of active users indicates that Twitter has had a powerful impact on Saudi society.

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The King Abdel Aziz City for Science and Technology bans anything that is immoral or against Islamic values (Open Net Initiative, 2009). “The most aggressive censorship [in Saudi Internet use] focuses on pornography, drug use, gambling, religious conversion of Muslims, and filtering circumvention tools” (Open Net Initiative, 2004; Shawna et al., 2011). The Saudi citizen has the right to use the Internet “unless the uses conflict with anything contravening a fundamental principle or legislation, or infringing the sanctity of Islam” (Saudi Internet Rules, 2001; Shawna et al., 2011). Internet users in the KSA are also prohibited from publishing and accessing "anything damaging to the dignity of heads of states or heads of credited diplomatic missions in the kingdom or that harms relations with those countries; and/or publishing and accessing false information ascribed to state officials or those of private or public domestic institutions and bodies, liable to cause them or their offices harm or damage their integrity" (“Saudi Internet Rules”, 2001; Shawna et al., 2011). The web page of the Internet Services Unit (ISU) presents Saudi Arabia Internet regulation activity and explains the type of information being filtered and why and how it is being filtered.

### **Social Media in Saudi Arabia**

Although the Saudi government continued to employ strict filtering of Internet content throughout 2016 and early 2017, social media has driven an immense diversification of online content (“Freedom on the net”, 2017). This diversity of content offers Saudis a multitude of perspectives beyond state-controlled media. Ordinary citizens have started to use these tools to raise awareness of issues surrounding political reform, poverty, gender inequality, and corruption (“Freedom on the net”, 2017). Popular social media and communication apps are not blocked, although authorities have imposed restrictions on their use, such as the messaging app, Telegram. Since January 9, 2016, users have reported severe bandwidth limitations preventing file and

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image sharing. Officially, sites that are judged to contain “harmful,” “illegal,” “anti- Islamic,” or “offensive” material are routinely blocked, including pages related to pornography, gambling, and drugs (“Freedom on the net”, 2017). Websites, such as Pirate Bay, that may be used to distribute copyrighted materials are blocked. Authorities also seek to disrupt the dissemination of violent extremism, sometimes resulting in the blocking of licensed news sites for publishing photos of militants of the so-called Islamic State (IS) (“Freedom on the net”, 2017).

According to a 2013 report by *The Social Clinic* entitled “The State of Social Media in Saudi Arabia 2012,” thirty-two million of Saudi Arabia’s ninety million citizens watch YouTube videos daily. This high activity in social media has ranked Saudi Arabia number one in the world. Saudi Arabia is also ranked number one in Twitter usage, with a growth rate of 3000 percent from 2011 to 2012, and it is still growing (Makki & Chang, 2015). The rate of social media users in Saudi Arabia has increased about ten times compared to global growth (Makki & Chang, 2015).

Statistics also show that there was an average of fifty million tweets per month in 2012 and 150 million tweets in 2013 in the country. Moreover, in 2012, two million out of six million Facebook users in Saudi Arabia used only their mobile devices to access Facebook. This number increased to five million in 2013 (Ng, 2016). In 2013, Instagram had 130 million active users with 45 million photos shared and one billion “likes” every day in the world. After 11 months, the growth of Instagram users unexpectedly increased by 54 percent and photo posts increased by 25 percent. Saudi Arabia is considered the number-one user of Instagram in the Arabic world.

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### **Saudi Women**

Although it has the power to raise awareness, Twitter has less power in Saudi Arabia, and Twitter sites have generated awareness and slight pressure on the KSA, especially in regards to the progress of women’s rights in Saudi Arabia. The practice of gender segregation in the country occurs constantly and this slows social change for women in this male-ruled society. There are current attempts in Saudi Arabia to help women to have more input in society and greater participation in public life, such as in 2015 when women were given the right to vote and run in municipal elections. Thirty women were added to the previously all-male Shura (government consultative council).

**The position of Saudi women in society.** Increased awareness in Saudi Society of the importance of educating women supports the belief in the ability of women to make positive change (Hamdan, 2006). The role of women is shifting from being exclusively housewives to being active participants in the workforce. The purpose of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, founded in 2005, is to increase enrollment of students studying abroad from 5000 to 150,000 over a ten-year period (Ministry of Higher Education, n.d.). Female students have been important participants in this scholarship program. However, the program is not without its tensions. Women experience a variety of push-and-pull factors (Li & Bray, 2007; Mostafa, 2006). Although the King Abdullah Scholarship allows women to have equal opportunity as men to study abroad, Saudi women face a number of challenges while studying. Every Saudi woman has to obtain permission from her guardian to be accepted into the program.

According Duhaim (n.d.), guardianship is “the office or duty of one who legally has the care and management of the person, or the estate, or both, of a child.” The law requires every Saudi woman to be subject to a guardian. The system of guardianship is given to the father from



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the birth of his daughter until she marries, in which case her guardianship transfers to her male spouse. If her father dies and she is single, guardianship becomes the responsibility of her uncle or brothers who are over 18 years old. If her husband dies, her guardianship passes to her eldest son (Nafjan, 2011). As a result of this, women cannot have any official document without permission of the guardian. For example, women cannot obtain a Saudi ID, acquire or renew a Saudi passport, open a bank account, enroll children in school, or enter a government department that has no women’s branch without permission from her guardian. Because of this, some women find the policy of guardianship a barrier and seek to abolish it (Human Rights Watch, 2008). In the past few years, the Saudi government has been working to fix this system to reframe the role of the guardian in the society. In 2015, in a step to give women greater freedom, the Saudi government began to admit women into the scholarship program who are over 18 and have good reasons to travel without the permission of their guardians (Bacchi, 2015).

**Saudi women and the use of social media.** When it comes to Saudi culture in particular, there is no doubt that it is a gender-segregated society. This segregation is extended to all private and public domains. Banks and universities have separate entrances for men and women, and restaurants and public transport are segregated. Communication is forbidden between unrelated men and women, and in professional contexts, interaction between genders is expected to be kept to a minimum. Many studies show that gender segregation in Saudi society is not a traditional practice. However, from the 1980s to the 1990s, it was actively promoted by the state, the revivalist Sahwa movement, the conservative Ulama, and the religious police who enforce public moral behavior. Gender segregation is considered one of the most important lines between reformists and conservatives. “Any attempt to diminish its enforcement is regarded as a direct attack on the standing of conservatives and Islam itself” (Madini & Nooy, 2014). According to

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Mtango (2004), "Women in Saudi Arabia can be seen to be in a position subservient to men as restrictions are strictly applied. Reference to Islamic requirements often explains these restrictions, but the Quran and other sources of Islamic law do not necessarily support the interpretations of the law the Saudi authorities apply."

In 2003, the Saudi government sponsored the "National Dialogue on Women's Rights and Duties, dialogues." Half of the participants of this event were women (Le Renard, 2008). This dialogue created a series of recommendations that reaffirmed the duty of women and the right of women to work and earn a living within the limits defined in the Qur'an and the consensus of religious scholars.

Specific segments of Saudi society are trying to find a way to raise concerns over women's rights, and social media platforms are vital to mobilizing and promoting these issues online. Many Saudi women choose online platforms as a way to express their life and to experience a more nonrestrictive lifestyle. Twitter is one channel in which Saudi women articulate issues related to women's rights in Saudi Arabia. They consider social media a platform well-suited for them to express their issues and receive support from women in other regions of the Kingdom.

Many social issues raised by women reach the public as a result of indirect online protests emerging on Twitter. This has created global pressure on the Saudi Arabian government to reevaluate the position of women in society. The advent of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have helped to open a new world where it has become easier to exchange ideas. Also, women are now able to raise awareness online and "launch campaigns to demand that women's rights be recognized" [in the KSA]" (Chaudhry, 2014).

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In September 2009, during the rule of King Abdullah, an important step taken by the government was opening King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), which has become a symbol of reform due to reducing gender segregation. This step, however, has exacerbated apprehension among conservatives.

Social networks can provide an “alternative online background” (Shen & Khalifa, 2010) for Saudi women as they are given the hope and opportunity to change the quality of their lives. Sharif and Al-Kandari (2010), investigating the motivations of Saudi women, have suggested that the use of online bulletin boards (OBBs) reflect “self-expression and autonomy motives.” Due to the nature of gender in Saudi society, Saudi women find that participating in public Internet discussions allows for anonymous communication without visibility or physical proximity (Al-Saggaf, 2012; Al-Saggaf & Williamson, 2004). Online communication for women is considered permissible behavior, an acceptable alternative to face-to-face communication in a physical setting. According to Pharaon (2004), the Internet enables Saudi women to do business online without having to meet male customers in person. The anonymity of online communication also provides opportunities for women to “circumvent gender restrictions imposed by conservative societies” (Pharaon, 2004; Sharif & Al-Kandari, 2010). According to Al-Saggaf and Weckert (2004), Internet anonymity has positive effects that help participants think more flexibly and become more mindful of social diversity with less inhibition about the opposite gender (cf. Al-Fadhli, 2008). On the other hand, the researchers have noted negative effects which include “contravening cultural values and feeling less constrained by social standards of language and behavior” (Madini & Nooy, 2014).

The public in Saudi Arabia had gained access to the Internet by the end of the 1990s. According to Mourtada and Salim (2011), 30 percent of Saudi women constituted the total

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number of social network users. A similar percentage of women across the Middle East have access to the Internet. A study conducted by Al-Saggaf (2011) concludes that women in Saudi Arabia tend to use Facebook to express their ideas, feelings, and personal, social and religious beliefs with others. Women use the platform for social reasons, including building and maintaining relationships with other social media followers. In this manner, these females have the opportunity to express their ideas with freedom as they live in a society where the older members (especially males) have the authoritative voice (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017).

Societies that grant civil and democratic values to their citizens tend to inhibit interactions with those outside the network (Gibson, 2001). When women are active social media users, it gives them a chance to fight for equal rights and to create renewed identities within their societies.

In 1991, there were numbers of women who drove their cars to protest ban on driving car. Their behavior was not accepted in Saudi society because it conflicted with Saudi norms. Although Islamic law does not prohibit women from driving, people believed that if women being legally able to drive, this would allow them to mix with males who are not their relatives, causing moral and social ills (AlMunajjed, 1997). As a result of these women’s behavior, the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia was addressed publicly to prevent any woman from driving a car.

Twitter is a powerful platform that helps Saudi women debate about their social rights. Manal Alsharif is a Saudi women’s rights activist who, in 2011, used Twitter to post a video of herself driving a car. Her “women2drive” campaign provoked an intense controversy on social media and provoked a forceful response. Where many people supported Manal’s action, others

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took an opposing stance. After the Manal campaign, several campaigns discussed a woman's right to drive in Saudi Arabia, most prominently #women \_ drive \_ next \_ month, # Saudi\_womwn\_drive.

Twitter and Instagram are strong online platforms that women rights activists used to raise their voices for the right of women to drive. Many hashtags (#) were released about it. Saudi society demonstrated an interest in such campaigns and many times, these campaigns trended on Twitter. The right for Saudi women to drive is one of the most controversial topics in KSA. Any hashtag released about women driving draws both supportive and opposing tweets. For example, one tweet in support (women # Saudi\_women\_driving) argued that driving was a woman's right. Being able to drive herself, as opposed to needing a driver, helps a woman save time and money. Indeed, she will depend on herself to go to work, one of the key policies of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's Vision 2030 about women. Moreover, they will have equal rights and they must be given their rights to help to enrich the economy of Saudi Arabia. Apart from this, many religious scholars supported and explained the ban. They claimed the ban was necessary for the social structure in Saudi society, not for religious reasons. Some believed this behavior would open the door to social and religious concerns such as women mixing with men other than those in her family. On the other hand, hashtags trends were developed by the people, who are against women driving car, believed that allowing women to drive has a bad agenda for them, and it will cause many social and religious issues such as mix with other men, communicate with them, or travel alone.

Additionally, many pictures posted on Instagram were related to women driving car topic (see Figure 3). One tag showed Manal Alsharif's picture and promoted her cause. Many other

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hashtags, #Saudi\_women, #saudi\_women\_driving, showed a positive attitude toward driving a car in Saudi Arabia; but not all of the comments supported the new change.

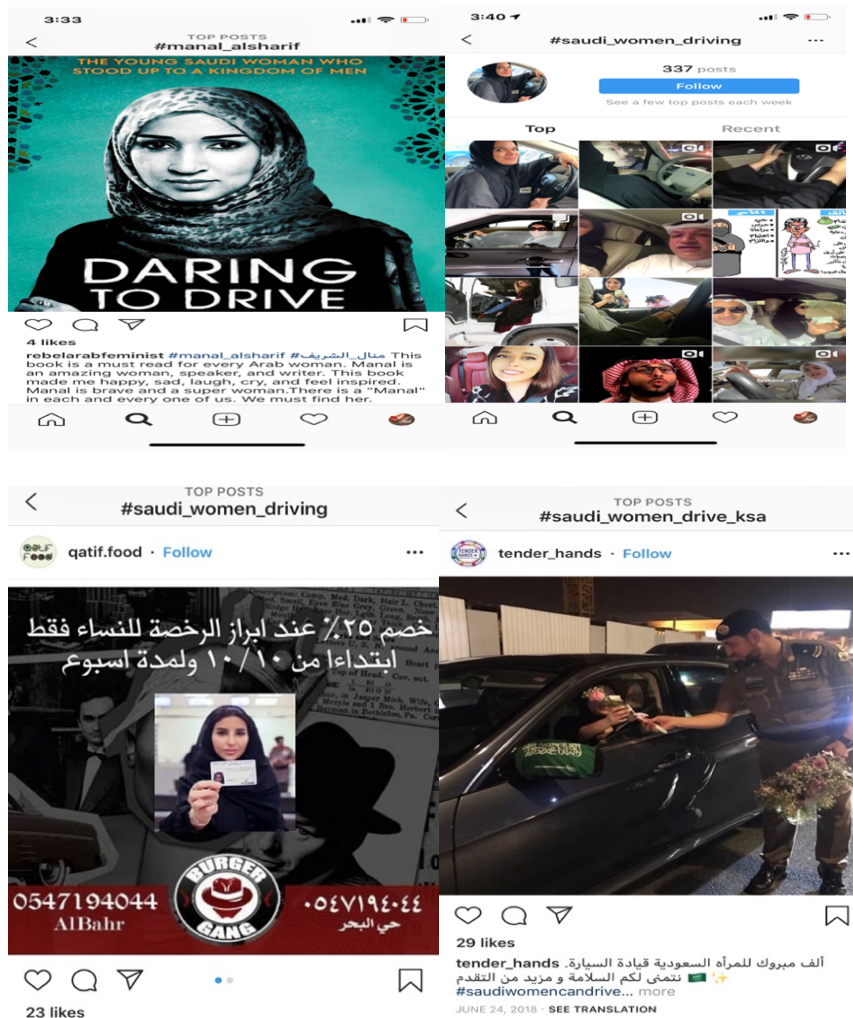


Figure 3. Posts on Instagram about Driving Car hashtags.

Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman announced the end of the era of preventing women from driving, and he aimed to loosen social restrictions and restore equality. In September 2017, the Saudi Arabian government officially announced that women have the right to drive and that it would officially end the driving ban. This announcement drew different reactions for Saudi

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citizens. Some of the respondents believed this was the right step toward achieving women’s rights while opponents think it violates too many social and religious tenets.

Riyadh Chamber of Commerce released a campaign to support women driving entitled, "تستاهلونها" (You Deserve It) (Sabq, 2019). Aiming to keep pace with the historic decision, the campaign is a factor that empowers women. It is not doubted that this step will have a positive effect on creating an enabling environment for increasing women's employment opportunities and enhancing their role in contributing to development (Sabq, 2019).

Hours before the decision was announced, #Saudi\_Women\_driving, supporting the new law, was trending on KSA Twitter as the most frequently tweeted hashtag, drawing great anticipation and support from the Saudi people.

There were many tweets regarding the aforementioned hashtag. One user tweeted “honey...tomorrow is the day of empowerment women of the driving and prove to all you deserve it [*sic*].” Another user tweeted “we support you.” For the first time in Saudi Arabia, the police were supportive of women who drove celebrating ending the driving ban. They gave them advice on traffic rules and offered them flowers. According to Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry, the number of women issued a driving license is currently 120,000 (Arabic.rt.com, 2018).

Beside the right to drive, guardianship is one of critical topics that related to Saudi women’s rights in Saudi Arabia. Because of the guardianship law in Saudi Arabia, males are responsible for women in many aspects such as women rights in jobs, travel, education, and marriage. In 2011, a group of women started a Facebook campaign to end guardianship. The title of the page was “Saudi woman wants dropping man’s guardianship.” That same year, Dr. Aisha Al mana, a women’s rights activist, organized a workshop for women in major KSA cities to present the meaning of guardianship under the law. One of the campaigns asked to end the

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requirement of parental consent to employ women and to abolish the authority of a guardian to dismiss his daughter, wife, or any woman under his guardianship from her work against her will. Twitter and Instagram also produced many hashtags about guardianship.

Ending guardianship is another controversial topic in KSA. Most of Saudi society does not agree with ending guardianship. However, King Salman ended the Guardianship such as consent on her education or any service and work as long as it does not conflict with the law in Saudi Arabia and does not conflict with Islamic principles. It is a new step toward female empowerment in Saudi society. Guardianship is a concept related to customs and traditions, not to Islam or national laws. The country aims to solve any serious issues peacefully and in a way that does not lead to a negative social reaction.

In 2016, the most significant digital activism in Saudi Arabia was the campaign to end male guardianship of women (“Freedom on the Net”, 2017). According to Saudi law, women are considered legal minors in need of male supervision to make decisions about their education, health, and career. In July 2016, Human Rights Organization created a report and a video clip in Arabic and English about this issue, inspiring hashtags on Twitter such as #IamMyOwnGuardian, and #CampaignToEndGuardianship (“Freedom on the Net”, 2017).

This campaign is considered one of the largest social network campaigns to end the guardianship system (“Freedom on the Net”, 2017). These hashtags continued for more than eight months. By September 2016, more than 14,000 men and women had signed a petition to the Royal Court, and in one weekend alone, nearly 2,500 women sent letters to the Court. As a result of these movements (“Freedom on the Net”, 2017), in May 2017, King Salman “issued a royal directive to government agencies limiting restrictions on women’s access to public services to cases where the limits are established by law” (“Freedom on the Net”, 2018).



### **Theoretical Background**

Various theories explain the adoption of social media among consumers. Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) suggests that people use media to gain a “core set of motivations,” such as information, social connection, and entertainment (Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004).

Uses and gratifications theory explains the manner in which people use media for their own gratification and needs. This implies that the theory is actually concerned with what individuals sort out with the media instead of what the media does with individuals. This contradicts the theory of the magic bullet, that audience plays an active role. Although it follows a user-audience centered approach, this theory does not assume the use of the media by people for their needs specifically. Needs and gratification are categorized to include tension-free needs, cognitive needs, personal integrative needs, affective needs, and social integrative needs (Ruggiero, 2000).

### **Background and Practices of Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and gratifications theory is a compilation of research in communication theories. It can be traced to a study on radio listeners during the 1940s. Other research has focused on children’s comics and the lack of newspapers due to producer strikes. However, the history of uses and gratifications theory falls within three stages (Luo, 2002).

**The first stage.** Herta Hertzog conducted interviews with a 1944 soap opera listening audience and established that from this form of entertainment, audiences sought three gratification types. These included emotional, wishful thinking and cognitive learning. Wilbur Schramm, in 1945, developed a formula to be used for determining media that can be selected by an individual. This formula formed the foundation for the development of this theory. The formula was designed to consider the amount of gratification that an individual looked forward

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to achieving from a certain media form. It also took into account the amount of effort that an individual expends to find the desired entertainment. Abraham Maslow stated in 1970 that uses and gratification theory were in the hierarchy of needs (Ruggiero, 2009).

**The second stage.** Denis McQuail and Jay Blumler, studying the 1964 elections in United Kingdom, categorized the motivation of people for watching political programs on television. The motivation of these audiences provided the foundation for their 1972 research, which later led to uses and gratification theory. Together with Joseph Brown in 1972, they proposed four uses of media: 1. personal relationships, 2. diversion, 3. surveillance, and 4. personal identity. The research team was later joined by Hadassah Haas, Elihu Katz and Michael Gurevitch to perform collaborative research on views of mass media (Ruggiero, 2009).

**The third stage.** Current research on uses and gratifications theory explores explanatory and predictive possibilities of this theory through connecting individual factors and the usage of media. The relationship on media usage and received gratification has drawn immense interest. Generally, uses and gratifications theory is crucial in shifting the media user’s focus and agency in the study of mass communication (Fourie, 2007).

**Modern day applications.** Uses and gratifications theory is today finding a great deal of relevance, especially as a tool showing how individuals connect with the technologies around them. Technologies include all that entail through using the Internet, mobile phones, and video gaming. Research on uses of mobile phones based on uses and gratifications theory seeks to discover the reasons why mobile phone users draw gratifications from their cell phones. These gratifications include entertainment, affection, mobility, and sociability. Similarly, social media usage can be informed by the need to obtain such gratifications as recognition, venting negative feelings and cognitive needs (Fourie, 2007).

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The earliest studies in uses and gratifications examined the motivations driving people to use specific types of traditional media sources, such as newspaper, television, radio, and film as well as the gratifications obtained from using these media sources. With the continued growth of technology, many types of media continue to emerge, creating many challenges for scholars trying to understand media tools. Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory suggests that “whatever gratifications users expect to receive from a media [source] may be different than what they actually receive” (Ballard, 2011).

Previous studies suggest that since the types of communication media have grown more numerous, these types of communication media provide exclusive benefits of gratifications to users (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

One study by Ballard (2011) examined Twitter as a form of social media through the uses and gratifications theory. This study used a survey, a traditional method used for U&G studies, to gather information allowing for better understanding of the gratifications that users obtain from Twitter. Also, this study provided information about how people use social media sites differently. The results of this study found that people used Twitter for many functions. They use Twitter to receive gratification and are careful about the posts they share. “The results suggest that Twitter users obtain more gratifications from the passive functions as being spectator/surveillance such as searching, following other users, and retweeting of Twitter rather [than] the active functions as being content-creation driven such as tweeting, mentioning other users, and directly messaging other users in terms of relational maintenance and entertainment” (Ballard, 2011).

In a similar study, Blumler and Katz’ uses and gratifications theory suggests that consumers for media play an important role in choosing the appropriate media. The theorists say

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that media users prefer to use some type of media because it provides a source that best fulfills the needs of the user.

Uses and Gratifications theory provides a deep understanding of users' motivations for media use and has been applied to many forms of media, from radio to television, cable TV, and now the Internet (Roy, 2008).

This paper, therefore, applies uses and gratifications theory to understand the motivations of Saudi women toward using Instagram and Twitter to create more social conscience to social issues relevant to the experience of Saudi women. The application of the uses and gratifications theory will provide a theoretical grounding and understand of a user's attitudes and intentions in using Instagram and Twitter as a way to deal with social issues.

### **Research Questions**

This paper aims to understand how social media such as Instagram and Twitter impact Saudi women, and what the gratifications are of using these social media. Many Saudi women use Twitter and Instagram actively, and these platforms help them deal with many issues in society. **This paper will focus on the issues that Saudi women discuss on social media.**

The objective of this paper is to answer specific questions to determine ways that using Instagram and Twitter affect the lives of Saudi women.

The following research questions aim to determine the reasons driving Saudi women to be active in both Twitter and Instagram. These platforms offer an interesting case study from which to understand how communication technology can impact discourse among women.

Q1A: How do Saudi women conceptualize Twitter participation?

Q1B: How is participation in Twitter reforming or shaping the position of women in Saudi society?

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### Q1 Sub-questions:

1. What is the main reasons (motivations) for using Twitter?
2. What gratifications do users achieve by using Twitter?
3. What types of information are Saudi women likely to disclose on Twitter?
4. What is Twitter’s role in the discussion of guardianship and the right to drive?

Q2A: How do Saudi women conceptualize Instagram participation?

Q2B: How is participation in Instagram reforming or shaping the position of women in Saudi society?

### Q2 Sub-questions:

1. What is the main reason (motivations) for using Instagram?
2. What gratifications do users achieve by using Instagram?
3. What types of information are Saudi women likely to disclose on Instagram?
4. What is Instagram’s role in the discussion of guardianship and the right to drive?

### **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

Literature on related topics suggests that qualitative methods are most appropriate for this discussion. To answer the given research questions, a qualitative method was the primary means of data collection. Qualitative research "begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative methodology, the researchers use "an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Creswell, 2013). The final written report presents "the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change" (Creswell, 2013).

The data in qualitative research is usually gathered by "talking directly to people and seeing them behave within their context" (Creswell, 2013). In the qualitative research process, researchers work on the multiple perspectives of participants and try to understand and learn the meaning of a problem or issue. A report making use of multiple participants should include diverse views on the topic to develop multiple themes reflecting those perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative research is the best way to study a problem or issue that needs to be explored, to study a group or population, to identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or to hear silenced voices. Data can be collected by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to narrate their experiences. Qualitative research is a way to empower individuals to share their stories and for the researcher to hear their voices.

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In order to answer the research questions presented in Chapter 2, an interview was developed. This section provides a description of the general methods that were used. It includes information about: (a) participants and (b) measurement.

### **Participants**

This study examined the impact on Saudi women of social media such as Instagram and Twitter. The study also examined how Saudi women deal with topics that are relevant to their experience, and whether these social media serve to empower Saudi women. This study used convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a “method that relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in a study” (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, the researcher sent a letter through, WhatsApp, a social network app popular in Saudi Arabia. The letter included the main purpose of study, which is how Saudi women use Twitter and Instagram differently and why. Participants were Twitter and Instagram users, and their participation in the study was voluntary. The researcher provided interviewee demographics to include age, social status, country of residence, and level of education. Interviews were conducted in person, or by using Apple’s Face Time or A similar application.

Due to limited time for research, the study involved a sample of seven Saudi women. The interviews were conducted in English and, in some cases, Arabic.

### **Measurement**

Upon IRB approval, the data collection instrument made use of qualitative in depth-interviewing methodology. This method served to provide a deeper understanding of interviewee thoughts, experiences, and perspectives. Because no subject can be identified by observation alone, in this research, interviews made use of conveyed experiences, meaning construction, and interpretation. I engaged in extensive interviews with seven Saudi women. I began by describing

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my own experience using Instagram and Twitter as a Saudi woman. When the data were collected and after reading the statements from the sample group, I identified significant statements, aiming to interpret their experiences. These statements were clustered into broader themes. My final step was to write a narrative describing the experience (textual description) and how the participants experienced it (structural description). These two descriptions were combined into a longer description describing the “essence” of their experiences as a whole. This formed the endpoint for the discussion.



#### **Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis**

The questionnaire was designed in English and then translated into Arabic. The questionnaire was used to build themes meant to understand a) the motivations among those sampled for using Instagram and Twitter, b) their reasons for using Instagram and Twitter differently, and c) the social gratifications achieved by using these platforms. Both Arabic and English language versions were available to the sample, with assurance that both questionnaires have the same meaning in both languages.

Collected data were organized and, to serve the purpose of the study, analyzed using a thematic analysis system. From the conversations, I looked for emerging ideas, and the thematic analysis helped me to provide a better understanding for these ideas (Aronson, 1995). Thematic analysis “[focuses] on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behavior” (Aronson, 1995). Thematic analysis has important steps. The first step is to collect data from interviews. The direct quotes or paraphrasing of common ideas can be found in the transcribed conversations. The subsequent step is to identify all data showing common patterns (Aronson, 1995). A thematic analysis combines and catalogues related patterns into sub-themes. Themes are identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985). The "coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together" (Leininger, 1985). The final step is to build a valid argument for choosing the themes (Aronson, 1995).

In order to critically analyze the data, I followed the steps of thematic analysis used by other researchers, which provided deep results (Guest et al., 2012).

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- First, I read the transcripts; then, I divided the data into subtopics to make it easier to understand and to help me notice potential themes.
- Next, I highlighted potential words, phrases, and sentences and organized them thematically, seeking connections between research questions and participant answers. This helped me to clarify any similarities and differences in their answers.
- Finally, I reviewed each word, phrase, and sentence in the participant answers for any potential themes and meaning that I may have missed earlier.

### **Self-reflexivity**

Self-reflexivity is an important tool for the researcher to establish validity in qualitative research. One of the important step to enrich the analysis in qualitative methods is researchers should pay attention to understand that “it is essentially a process of self-critique by the researcher to examine how her/his own experiences might or might not have influenced the researcher process” (Dowling, 2006). Self-reflexivity helps me to acknowledge my own subjectivity in thoughts, biases, and feelings toward the research and therefore to focus on the purpose of the study, preventing bias interference with data interpretation. I found that writing my thoughts while analyzing the data were useful to achieving reflexivity.

The current chapter describes the findings of interviews with the seven subjects and the data analysis techniques used in this thesis. This study aims to understand the motivation that drives Saudi women to fulfill various roles in their society and to be involved in social events through a uses and gratification theory lens. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or by FaceTime app in accordance to the preferences of the participants. The key points of each interview were highlighted and linked with the previous interview for theme development. After interviews were recorded, they were returned to the participants to check over.

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The age range of participants was between 28 and 50 years old. Only one participant was single while the other six were married and have children. Three participants were living in KSA while four of them were living in USA.

The participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. After the data collection was complete, the following themes were deduced.

### **The Uses and Gratification of Twitter for Saudi Women**

**Theme1: Seeking important information.** In Saudi society and all over the world, Twitter is a great source of information and a popular cultural phenomenon. The social network is also both news-gathering and an effective social media marketing tool. This multiplicity of functions makes Twitter also a representation of social status. The search field is the most useful function on Twitter. A user can access past events, current information, public opinion, and discussion about a company, event, person or username by typing the subject in the search bar. In light of current social media reports, it has been found that more than 600 million searches occur daily on Twitter, a figure that is increasing rapidly. Twitter is considered an updated and authentic source of information and this is why a major gratification sought from the social media is seeking information (Brown, 2010).

Sarah is an Arabic teacher and mother for three boys and one girl. In our interview, she stated “The reason I use Twitter is to explore the events that happen every day.”

Asma is married, has two children, and owns a company in IT and advertising. She shared “I love to explore the news, to see what is coming in, and what is the news. I like to take the news from it; it is a credible [resource] to know what is the trend.”

Fatimah has bachelor’s degree in Human Resources and is a photographer. When I asked her why she used Twitter, she replied, “To view the latest news and developments in the Arab world

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and the world.”

Twitter is not just a social media platform, but an effective news outlet, as well. Twitter makes observable those things that we cannot observe in person. The “collective narrative” is one of the key features of Twitter. It allows users to create their own world. Twitter creates a distinguished network comprised of different topics and cultures. In this way, it helps users to gain knowledge of these topics and interact with different cultures (Bernoff, 2010).

In our interview, Sarah shared this:

I love exploring other points of view and opinions. I love to explore the opinions of both my followers and [those] I AM following because you can judge others usually through their writing. You can know their personality through their writing, debating, and [it helps you to] know the minds of young people. Their outlook and culture is what I like most about Twitter.

Maha who is married and Ph.D. student, her major is higher education administration, and she expressed how important Twitter is to understand society and different types of news in addition to political news:

I feel Twitter is like a window in society. We usually [say] in Saudi society, Twitter shows what is in people’s mind. It is a window for news because it gives you news quickly, and it highlights the most important points. It also is a window for what happens in social, educational, political [aspects of society]. For this reason, you feel updated about anything in society and the world, too.

Rose, a Ph.D. medical student in United States, shared this:

I mainly use Twitter to check the news because Twitter focuses on political views and news. And what is currently going on around the world i.e major trends in the news.

**Theme 2: Trending topic.** Because of this feature, tweeters and other users can participate in discussion pools and express their opinions on topics of interest. Twitter also gives them an option to set their topic or top trend both locally and globally. Placing hash-tag (#) in the beginning of particular word allows the users to discuss the same topic, to compile all the tweets about that topic, and to set it as a trend to catch the attention of other users in real time.

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Generally, a trending topic is most recent event heavily discussed and tweeted by tweeters. These events can be national or international. Nearly 85 percent of trending topics are also discussing breaking news and persistent headlines in mainstream media (Kwak et al., 2010, p. 591).

Eman is married and a graduate of a university in the United States, and she is seeking a job. She shared the following:

Twitter helped me express my opinion on different issues around the world. I like to share my opinion with my followers, and if I find hashtags that are interesting to me. I like to participate... However, in some hashtags that talk about women, I do not like to participate if I find there is some bad agenda behind it. These people are not honest.

For example, there are a lot of hashtags about women such as violence, and after a while we discovered it was not real. I participate in hashtags about finding jobs because I am a new graduate, and most companies need experience, which I do not have.

We talked in hashtag about the opportunities for Saudi women to find a job. I wrote a tweet about the experience in a job. And even I do not have a lot of followers. I wrote I need to work first then I can get experience. I received a great interaction with others.” Most people agreed with my Tweet.

**Theme 3: Giving space to Saudi women.** Discussing Arab culture is a reason to use social platforms and influence online behaviors. Beside Arab culture, practicing self-expression and autonomy are the main reasons that females in the Arab Gulf countries use online bulletin boards (OBBs) (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). This study indicated that the majority of females use OBBs because they offer users full autonomy to express themselves. The respondents relay that they can discuss their issues freely on OBBs. It lets them ask questions (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). The freedom of expression that OBBs represent is absent in "conventional offline social settings" and this is why: Women in the Gulf choose online bulletin boards to exercise their autonomy. Access to media tools in their conservative culture is limited. This cultural context “emphasize[s] that females need to be reserved in social conversations” (p. 49). However, social media is influencing this conservative culture, leading the Gulf toward gender

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equality by introducing concepts of autonomy and freedom of expression (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010).

Maha supported this point:

Yes, Twitter helps me to connect with different social levels in society such as connecting with students, doctors, and older people. It is easy to have intellectual communication at different social levels. It is easy to connect, interact and explore their debates.

Additionally, Eman explained how Twitter aids her as Saudi women:

I think Twitter gives me space to express my opinion. However, anyone who misbehaves using Twitter can be reported and get a ban from Twitter. Twitter has the most interaction space. No other platform does this.

Asma agreed with other participants on how Twitter provides space for women to connect easily with others, especially in conservative society:

Yes, I mean, I am more capable of posting any topic freely, without restrictions. I can find a lot of interacting with the subject.

However, Sarah did not completely agree with the other points of view. For her, Twitter was a good place to meet and get to know other people, but it does not provide space for women:

Not for everyone. I can log into platforms and write my opinion using my name. I do not know about others. There are reservations. Many women are still cautious, such as whether to enter a pseudonym or not. They feel if they participate, it is a shame.

Not only have the views and opinions about our position as women changed there is more awareness. Rights that women begin to see are driving and freedom of career. You know personalities are different in people's thoughts and views. Accepting a woman driving a car differs from their cultural perception of society.

Norah, married and with one child, is living in the United States with her husband. She contributed the following:

The man is the second half of the woman and the thought of the man is different from the [thought of the woman]. [On Twitter,] it is easy to interact with men and exchange ideas and views with them without any hindrance.

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I am kind of neutral about my feelings [of whether] Twitter helped me as a Saudi woman or not. Because it depends on the situation I am encountered with. Because sometimes I feel that the news in Twitter is actually showing the reality of the Saudi women and all the good changes that are going on inside Saudi Arabia.

However, sometimes I feel [that] people still underestimate the power of the Saudi women (when I check Arabic accounts) particularly if she is not wearing her hijab or covering up, which makes me think that we as women [are] still suffering from the stupid mentality. I can't believe with all these changes that are going on by our great leader King Salman and Prince Muhammed bin Salman; still there is this mentality against women.

As an example, I was reading news about a Saudi girl who works in NASA now. I was so proud of her because I [had] not heard about her achievements in the local news. But when I started to read the comments, some were positive and proud of her, while others commented that she should cover herself, wear [her] hijab. 'This is what we get from sending our women to western, non-Muslim countries' [they say].

Moreover, the stereotype about the Saudi women, particularly by the western news, shows Saudi women as weak and illiterate, covered head to toe; their men married [to] four wives! Even if the post about Saudi women is positive, all the comments are negative and full [of] stereotyping.

**Theme 4: Increasing awareness about women rights.** Twitter has become a favorite tool for communication and discussion on different topics. As an effective source of information dissemination, it helps users connect with other people. For posing and holding discussions, Twitter provides the best platform compared to other social media platforms (Jansen et al., 2009). Fatimah shared the following statement about Twitter:

Certainly, it helped me to know my rights as a Saudi citizen, such as the account of lawyer Khaled Khalawi and his awareness of women's legal rights. It helped me more by knowing my rights as a consumer of certain accounts supporting citizens such as the account of Faisal Abdul Karim and his warning to consumers about buying fake products.

Recently, with the kingdom's keenness on the rights of Saudi women and the cause that has occupied the public opinion, women car driving, because this topic targets us as women in this conservative society.

Maha supported the idea of Twitter helping to provide awareness of the women's movement in Saudi society:

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It's an improvement to acknowledge the Saudi women's movement with rights such as court law, inheritance, custody of children, etc. I remembered lawyers [talking about educating] women on their rights. Some groups show there is a defect in terms of employment. There are hashtags that discuss these issues by sharing photos that approve this defect. In the past, it was hard to use a blog, but Twitter now is fast. What distinguishes [it] is the fast interaction.

Rose explained,

I believe Twitter made me discover a lot of issues that are facing Saudi women. I live in the western part of the country where it is more open, liberal and accepting of women's independence. But Twitter showed me that all these qualities are not applicable to the rest of the women inside Saudi. There are still women who are fighting for their education, work or getting married to the man they like. There are still women who can't choose their life or make their own choices. This is terrible! I discovered that domestic violence is still going on and women keep silence and can't even disclose it because they are afraid of divorce, their families' reaction if they got divorced, and if their kids will be taken away. Also, Saudi women still don't know enough about their legal rights.

Norah explained her attitude about using Twitter as tool to interact with society about women's rights: “I do not like these topics because they reflect negatively on me.”

**Disclosing information.** People avoid disclosing personal information on online platforms like Twitter (Reid and Reid,2007). However, according to Ballard (2011), Twitter users can share different types of information, such as their personal hobbies, interests, and activities, and they avoid disclosing information about religious or political beliefs, drug and alcohol behavior, and romantic or sexual relationships.

Rose commented that she would discuss political topics, give her opinion about different topics, and give information that related to her major:

I usually discuss topics related to politics and also opinions about various stuff around the world. Also, funny pictures and videos. Also, things related to pediatrics because this is my specialty.

Fatimah relayed her experience sharing general information about herself: “General information about my specialties, hobbies, and some tweets that attract me.”



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Maha said she liked to share many different types of information about personality, religion, and beneficial information to public:

I like to share information that helps to build personality, religious stories that have wisdom, Sunnah, Quran, increase public awareness. Also, I like to build effective dialogue because some people have a lack of awareness of how to have effective interactions, constructive arguments, and accept other people’s views.

I like to share videos that explain what effective dialogue looks like, and accept the feedback, whatever the type. We should look [at] the words, not the person. If you get to interact with others, you do not judge the person; you should evaluate the idea.

Eman also conveyed her preference to share her ideas, thoughts, and information that may be helpful for others: “If I want to write my thought, I share information about my major [to] whoever needs help. If I know the information, I help them. Sometimes, pictures about places I visited.”

Sarah interacts with others about historical or social information. She loves to correct misinformation:

Sometimes historical or social information is a fallacy. When someone is writing a topic, or poses and it has a mistake, I feel I need to share the correction I know. I like to participate in these things. For example, someone comes to the subject and comments on it, I would like to comment that this is [their] point of view is fallacy should be noticed.

Asma likes to disclose her work and comments on the Tweets of others: “I share information about my work and some responses and opinions, such as I am proud of my country. I share information about how to raise children.”

### **The Uses and Gratification of Instagram for Saudi Women**

**Theme1: Entertainment.** The motivations that drive users to use Instagram, like other social media platforms, can vary depending on people and time. Generally, entertainment is the most attractive motivation behind using social networking service (Special & Li-Barber, 2012).

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The most important reason for Maha was to find a way to find fun. Instagram helps her because it focuses on videos and photos. Most users for these accounts share photos of their creative works to share them with others:

When I came to United States, I preferred to use Instagram because it [was] for fun. Instagram does not focus on political, and on deep intellectual issues. Instagram is a breather to me [from] the alienation. When I hear the word Instagram, it means my fun, fashion, makeup, travel, kitchen tools. Instagram [is] attractive [to] me when I am emotionally cumbersome, and I need to rest, and change my mood. So, Instagram is a breather to me.

Eman agreed with Maha about the significant gratification she obtained from Twitter: “I use Instagram in [the] first place for fun.”

She added that others found using Instagram to share photos with their friends was pleasurable:

“To share my photos. I like to take photos. I like to get benefits from people who share experiences in different fields like making coffee, cooking, traveling.”

Asma felt that Instagram fulfills her needs. It provides a lot of joy [while] looking for information:

Recently, I like Instagram more. I feel it enriches me more than other communication programs. For example, [in] the live feature, I can enter lectures, discover new information, posts, and sponsors.

For example, I am looking for a shop, medical information, or information on companies. Even if I lost the name of the place, I enter [the name] to find this information. I look for all type of products such as clothes, foods. For example, Dr. Sumaya Nasser always logs in for the Live feature. I free myself [one] hour a day to watch her ‘live’ video.

**Theme 2: Self-presentation.** SNS allow the users to engage themselves in different self-presentation activities including personal profile development, message posting, status updates, and photograph album management (J. Kim & Lee, 2011). Self-presentation is determined as one of the most important a gratification among Instagram users (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, & Hopkins, 2013). This is why Instagram is considered a self-presentation empowerment tool.

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Rose shared: “I like Instagram because I can share my personal photos and videos on [it].” “I usually follow accounts that are related to my personal interests such as, singers, music, cooking, learning a hobby, etc.”

Maha explained:

Another reason is that I love to take pictures, and Instagram depends on photos. I love it also because the information is short and focused because our lifestyle is busy between family and study. Usually, the information under the pictures is short, about a line to two lines. The final reason, I am [a] visual person and Instagram supports this in me.

Fatimah uses Instagram because she is a photographer. The self-representation helps her in her work. She shared her experience:

To have others view my work in photographs.  
It helps me a lot in photography. It is a hobby and became my job. It is an essential source of income to me. Starting from taking pictures for parents and children to filming weddings and events in the Gulf.

**Theme 3: Instagram, creativity, and Saudi women.** Instagram helps women in different ways. It helps them be creative and start businesses. Asma shared her experience on using Instagram as a Saudi woman:

It helps me, but to others, I do not know, but in general, it helps everyone. For example, the productive family of Saudi women [is] more beneficial than I think. Even the owners of the companies help them in business. For me, if I see the number of followers high, I feel this account is credible. Even if my theory suffers from lack of validity.

Rose, agreed with Asma about the way Instagram helps Saudi women in business: “I am not sure because my Instagram is more personal, and I interact with few people. However, there are several accounts run by Saudi women where they share their work such as make-up artists and designers.”

When I asked Sara whether Instagram helped her as Saudi women, she believed that Instagram does not offer this to Saudi women as Twitter does: “Twitter is better than Instagram because it

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is renewed by introducing new topics politically and economically, and hashtags. And it's the best for women from my point of view.”

Maha explained her opinion if Instagram help Saudi women. Instagram platform is for fun, not a platform to deal with important topics related to women:

Instagram is not for serious stuff. However, it is a window to see the development of society. You can see these developments change through it more than to know your rights. It's just [a] window to see what is new and trending in some areas such as fashion and makeup.

Instagram does not help me to know topics or issue about women like Twitter. When I need serious information, I go to Twitter to explore when you said discuss women issues; Instagram never comes to my mind. Maybe snapshot and Twitter. For example, if one account in Instagram exposes some topics, and you give your opinion and it is different, usually, [the holders of] these accounts revise and remove these opinions. For example, one account is a woman who is famous, and gives training about how to develop yourself and how to accept different views. One day, she discussed a topic, and I shared my opinion and discovered that she removed my comments because they were different and [she] blocked me. I was sure I wrote my comment very politely, and the purpose was [to give] positive feedback. When I start to read other comments, it was only with the same opinion with her, and she removed different opinions. This is an issue on Instagram you cannot find on Twitter. Honestly, I do not feel Instagram is a source to discuss important issues in the society.

**Disclose information on Instagram.** The Instagram app focuses on videos and photos.

All the participants love to post their photos. Also, this motivates users to continue using Instagram as “surveillance or knowledge about others.”

Rose discussed the information that she can share with others through Instagram:

“I usually share pictures and videos about my activities, trips, and adventures.”

As a result of Fatimah's job as photographer, she likes to share her photos and videos. She explained: “It is all about my photography hobby.”

Eman shared the same with others about sharing her photos:

Personal photos, my trips, my cooking. I follow creative, interesting account[s]. There are a lot of creative Saudi women in cooking, makeup. Instagram help[s] them to share videos and live videos.

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I follow people who share the same hopes, people who know [how] to take photos. I enjoy exploring their accounts.

Besides sharing personal photos, Maha loves to share funny pictures and photos that carry meaningful purpose:

In Instagram, I like to share family pictures, natural photos because I love taking photos. To capture my children and my brothers to share their success stories. Funny pictures. Because I am here in United States, I love to share positive experience to transfer these good experiences to my family and my society.

Because the main reason to use Instagram for me is for fun, most accounts are about traveling. Some accounts talk about scholarships, and it introduces information about products and advice that help students who study abroad. Accounts for fashion, makeup, friends, and sports.

Asma commented about the type of information that she may share on Instagram: “On

Instagram, I post everything, such as my kids' photos, my trip, etc.”

Sarah, however, does not share a lot of personal photos. She likes to add comments and “likes” to others: “Sometimes, I like to write comments when my friends and family post pictures and give ‘likes’ for pictures and videos.”

### **Guardianship and The Right to Drive**

Both guardianship and driving a car are hot topics of discussion both in Saudi Society and around the world as they are related to the freedom and independency of Saudi women.

There are numerous hashtags on Twitter and Instagram that highlight the campaigns regarding guardianship and the right to drive.

**The right to drive.** The ban on women driving was related to the social structure of Saudi society instead of to religious reasons. The hashtag "Saudi Women driving" became a trend on Twitter site in Saudi Arabia, hours before the introduction of the decision to allow

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women to drive in the Kingdom. This trend brought great anticipation and received huge support from Saudi society.

Fatimah shared her point of view: “I agree completely with women driving because it is a meaningful purpose. Also, it doesn't conflict with Islamic principles.”

She added that Twitter played a vital role in the driving debate: “Twitter certainly has a strong impact because of the rapid spread of the hashtags in Saudi Arabia and the participation of the community in the campaign in a positive or negative way.”

Eman supported Fatimah’s statement: “our religion has no issue with the right to drive, but it is completely a government decision.”

Asma commented on the effect of Twitter and Instagram on the driving campaign: “The publicity campaigns in Twitter about driving encourage me to drive while I do not think Instagram is not appropriate to discuss important topics.”

**Guardianship.** Guardianship is a complex and controversial topic of discussion in Saudi society as it is directly linked with the social structure of Saudi Arabia. Guardianship is a principle of Islam that is supposed to protect women’s rights. However, many customs of Saudi society have used these principles to create a complicated structure of guardianship. Most Saudi citizens do not accept the abolition of guardianship. When I asked the participants about this topic, Fatimah said:

I know there were many hashtags on Twitter about guardianship. I do not support the idea of these hashtags. Guardianship in Islam is clear, and I believe Islam grants women a lot of rights, so I am against abolition the guardianship.

Eman explained that,

As I told you before, some hashtags have a bad and hidden agenda.

I do believe in women rights and I do support any woman who needs to be supported

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for an actual injustice, she might have suffered; however, I do not like the way the girls [use] Twitter to distort Saudi society in order to get their claimed freedom. Today, in real life (not the media one), Saudi women are more supported and empowered than ever, and the best is not coming yet.

Guardianship is somehow related to our religious concepts, which states that the man is responsible of the management of his family life without any kind of abusing.

I do not think [that] guardianship is obligatory in some things such as enrollment in college, but I think guardianship is obligatory for marriage and travel affairs. We know if the guardianship abused his daughter and does not let his daughter get married, the government agencies guarantee this right [marriage] to her. For the abused woman, I see that it is possible [to] happen to any woman, even if there is no guardianship.

Asma shared the same point of view: “I am not interested in this subject and I do not monitor these hashtags. I am convinced about guardianship because guardianship means care, protection, honor, and responsibility toward women.”

Maha had a general opinion about both driving and guardianship. She explained:

In accordance with the Islamic religion and its principles then, what do the laws of the Kingdom consider appropriate? As a Muslim woman, I have full confidence that the religious principles guarantee me pride. Maybe the problem stems from the lack of accurate understanding of some Islamic law or the mix of customs and traditions, but the preservation of the religion and identity is the most important purpose and at the same time repair some gaps and defect that may exist like any other community.

Rose commented on driving, guardianship, and how Twitter had a role in these topics:

People [saw] in Twitter [that some were] against women driving and did not want to end the law of guardianship. But when King Salman announced that women will drive and should be treated equally in every aspect of life, everybody just followed it, even people who were against it (Lol). Also, I think Twitter showed the pros and cons about what people think about guardianship and women’s right to drive in KSA. Unfortunately, I think the majority of the posts of people against driving are from accounts of people who are not residents inside Saudi because of the way they describe the life inside Saudi as if it is a living hell, which is totally not true. It is a country that values its citizen’s rights [to] free education, free universities, free health, scholarships, and opportunities to work.

Very few campaigns actually focus on improving women’s rights inside KSA and improving the country with vision 2030, which I think [is] good because they want every Saudi member to work on themselves and their families, which will then improve the country. However, there are plenty of foreign campaigns (e.g. human rights, Arabic BBC, Arabic CCN) who claim that their goal is to free Saudi women as if we are living [in] a

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PRISON, which I do not think so. These campaign posts are so negative, I feel like their goals [are] to cause a disruption or an Arab Spring inside Saudi, encouraging Saudi women to escape, or destroy the country. King Abdullah RIP did a lot of good things for the families inside Saudi, particularly with Saudi women. In the past two-three years, King Salman, with his son Prince Mohammed bin Salman, ruled the country after King Abdullah deceased. They have made a lot of great changes to improve the life of Saudi women, which include driving and no guardianship in anything. Women can do what they want to do. But these campaigns do not show it in their post news.

Rose further commented on the role of Instagram in these campaigns:

I do not see that Instagram has a direct contact on any of these campaigns. Actually, compared to Twitter, I barely see this kind of campaign[on] Instagram. Maybe [this is] because of the type of the material I am following on Instagram, which is mainly about decorations, clothes, cooking, celebrities, etc.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the following themes that emerged from the findings of the interviews: In Twitter, seeking important information, trending topics, giving space to Saudi women, increasing awareness about women rights while in Instagram the common themes were entertainment, self-presentation, Instagram itself, creativity and Saudi women. These themes served to answer the research questions that informed this study. In the final chapter, I present a discussion of the findings and offer a conclusion.



### **Chapter Five: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the uses and gratification of Twitter and Instagram and how Saudi women use these platforms to fulfill their needs in their society. This chapter offers a discussion of the research findings based on the themes that emerged from the data collection on the experiences of Saudi women using Twitter and Instagram differently to fulfill their needs.

In this study, I started by covering many areas in the literature review that are related to my investigation. The literature review covered general information on social media and Saudi women. Subsequent topics include Instagram, Twitter, Twitter and Arab Spring, social media in Saudi Arabia, the position of Saudi women within Saudi Arabia, the theoretical background for the study and to provide a lens that enabled me to analyze my data. It provided more insight into how Saudi women use social networking platforms to fulfill their needs.

In the following section, I am going to discuss how the results answer my research questions. To interpret the results of this study, a critical discussion of limitations is also included. Potential directions for future research are also discussed.

After I analyzed and presented the participants answers, it is obvious that the uses and gratifications obtained from Twitter and Instagram are different. The major gratifications and uses of Twitter focus on seeking information, trending topics, giving space to Saudi women, and increasing awareness about women rights. However, the uses and gratifications that were obtained from Instagram are focusing on entertainment, self-presentation, and Saudi women creativity.

### **The Uses and Gratification of Twitter for Saudi Women**

In this section, I will determine the most significant uses and gratification from using Twitter and how Saudi women apply it to their needs. Many studies have found that gathering information is target to use social network sites “SNS.” According to Hughes and Palen (2009), the social media most accessed by users in the KSA for information sharing and information gathering is Twitter.

In this section, I will discuss how Saudi women use Twitter to fulfill their needs in light of uses and gratifications theory. Based on the literature review, social media promotes the "democratization of information and knowledge" because it “allow[s] for the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Ballard, 2011). Users share ideas, files, and messages, which enables them to evade institutional control of information (Ding & Zhang, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, specific segments of society and women’s rights activists are trying to find a way for the propagation of their message. Social media is a ready platform to enable discussion of these issues and to mobilize and promote them online. Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) argues that people use social media to gain “core set of motivations.” Obtaining Information and receiving social connections, and feeling entertainment are three key elements of this core set of motivations (Dholakia, Bagozzi & Pearo, 2004).

The first and second research question probed how Saudi women conceptualize Twitter participation, and how participation in Twitter is reforming or shaping the position of women in Saudi society.

While I analyzed the interviews of each participant in this study, one of the main findings of this study is that seeking information is the major gratification for Twitter users. The participants agreed that Twitter allowed them to acquire or disseminate information instantly on

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its network. Twitter empowers Saudi women to search for news that is important to them. By examining the interview answers for the gratifications from Twitter, I can deduce that the platform has social and personal utility for these users.

For instance, Asma shared that Twitter fulfilled her need to know the news. Maha explained that Twitter was a source for important news. It keeps her updated and helps her to understand what is going in Saudi society. It is an easy and quick method to search for news of all types. Eighty-five percent of trending topics on Twitter are current events closely related to media headlines. Moreover, they are persisting in the news from a long period of time (Kwak et al., 2010).

Overall, the participants pointed out the main reason to use Twitter was to seek news and information. Twitter conveniently allows them to reach different types of information. They agreed that the most significant type of news is politics. Twitter allows its users to contribute in discussion forums through sharing their personal opinion, interests, political, economic or social ideologies and different perspectives of life. Twitter is considered the social media platform which favors the “wordsmith” and plays the role of political leverage (Ahmad, 2010). Additionally, trending topics catch the attention of large number of users. These are hot topic of discussion that are highly tweeted. Placement of hashtags helps users understand what is going on in society and how to deal with it. Eman relays her experience of sharing using different hashtags; the most important is to know the purpose of hashtags because the position of Saudi women in society is different than other women in the world. She likes to participate in discussions and express herself. However, some hashtags on general topics may be important to Saudi women. Rose agreed about the hidden agenda and how it is difficult to discuss issues related to women.

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Through placing hashtags, a user can participate in discussion about his/her topic of interest. The hashtag is a way to connect to a large discussion pool on a particular topic and it helps to compile the tweets about that topic. Eman explained her experience of how she shares a hashtag to deal with issues important to her as a Saudi woman. Moreover, Asma agreed that Twitter hashtag was great way to deliver her voice to solve her problems and to communicate with friends working in same place.

One of most important factors is the distinction of a woman’s position in Saudi Arabia. Twitter provides her a way to reach different levels in society. It helps her to connect easily, to share her thoughts and opinions, and to deliver her voice without restrictions. Eman confirms that sentiment. Maha, in her interview, pointed out that Twitter paves the way for women to be in contact with anyone and allows discussion in many topics important to women.

All of the participants identify the most important gratification they obtain from Twitter is seeking information. Twitter plays significant role to help Saudi women to deal and interact with others about different topics that relate to the experience of women in the KSA.

### **The Uses and Gratifications of Instagram for Saudi Women**

The third and fourth research questions probed how Saudi women conceptualize Instagram participation, and how participation in Instagram reforms or shapes the position of women in Saudi society.

Through my analysis of the participants’ interviews, I identified one of critical factor related to Instagram that fulfill the uses and gratifications is to provide entertainment. Uses and gratifications theory helps me understand why women using Instagram and the reasons behind adopting Instagram.

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According to the interviews, I found that the main gratification and the reason that attracts Saudi women to use Instagram is for fun and pleasure. Entertainment, or perceived enjoyment, may be an essential criterion in users' intention to adopt and continue to use new services (E. Lee et al., 2015). For example, Maha, studying for her Ph.D. in United States, prefers to spend her time on Instagram because it is a platform providing joy for users, and it does not deal with serious topics. Eman agrees with this perspective.

As made evident in the interviews, there is no doubt that the participants of this study use Instagram for self-representation. All the participants agreed that they like to share their photos including personal photos, their kids' photos, their trip photos. In terms of instant photograph sharing, simplicity and visualized description, Instagram is superior (Ting et al., 2015). Generally, self-representation is great source of gratification from Instagram (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare & Hopkins, 2013).

Moreover, participants pointed out that Instagram helps Saudi women in creative ways. It helps them to express their ideas by sharing different photos. For example, Sarah shared that Instagram helps her to find information such as looking for details on a restaurant or store. Asma pointed out that Instagram's search bar helps her to look for what she needs. Because of this feature, many Saudi women benefit from these businesses.

### **Guardianship and The Right to Drive**

The fourth research question probes how Instagram and Twitter help Saudi women discuss important topics of guardianship and the right to drive. After the analysis of the participants' responses, I found the majority agreed with women driving, and they considered it a basic right for women. Twitter played an important role to promote the campaign regarding women right to drive as it helped to spread hashtags about women driving. Also, it gave Saudi

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society an opportunity to present their views and discussed these controversial topics. According to the participants, Instagram is not at the level of Twitter to discuss this issue, but since it is a pictures platform, it gave a chance to Saudi women to share their pictures when they were driving car for the first time in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, it provided a chance to Saudi society to interact through these pictures.

According to the interviews and past literature review, guardianship is very controversial topic in Saudi Society. It is a mix of Saudi social norms and Islamic principles. Although the lifestyle in Saudi society has changed in the last few years, it remains a conservative society. Saudi society aims to protect both their traditional customs and Islamic law. It is time that the society understand the difference between Islamic guardianship and social guardianship. Many participants did not support the campaign to preserve guardianship because they believe it is Islamic law even if some aspects of the guardianship law are culturally based. Some of the participants explained that they did not have any problem with their guardians, so they do not know a lot about guardianship law. When the guardian abuses his role, the government will drop his guardianship. King Salman eliminates guardianship when a woman is willing to go for public services and this service does not require the Islamic guardianship. The participants believe that Twitter was a strong platform to share hashtags about this topic, even if they did not support the ideology behind it.

### **Limitations**

As with every study, this exploratory study has limitations. One of the most obvious limitation is the number of participants. I could not find enough Saudi women to participate. I tried to encourage them with assurance that confidentiality is a critical ethical item in this study, but they did not want to be participants, and in my opinion this refusal is due to the nature of

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Saudi society. Usually Saudi women do not like to share about topics if they feel there is a chance of discussing sensitive topics about society or themselves. Saudi society is conservative, and people do not like to discuss these topics because they believe these topics are not important to them. They are satisfied with their lives, or even if they think change is needed, talking about these issues to a researcher will not help them, and does not have anything to do with the law or government in Saudi Arabia. In general, there is a lack of published studies that attempt to understand how culture can impact the need to use social media platforms, especially in such conservative societies as Saudi Arabia. This study is the beginning of more studies to come that will try to understand how social media can fulfill the need of women and society for equal rights. This lack of data in this study would make comparing these results with subsequent studies difficult. This current study was focused on gratifications that Saudi women receive from Twitter and Instagram when they deal with topics that concern them. The sample for this study represents a limited population. Additionally, this study focuses on limited gratifications obtained from using Twitter and Instagram.

### **Future Directions**

Due to the growth of social media, there will be a growing motivation for new communication networks. As a result of using these platforms, people will seek gratification through them. The Saudi women’s gratifications obtained through social media will fuel more creative use of the platforms than simply as channels for communication.

Future studies should focus on overcoming the limitations of this exploratory study. Expanding the sample of study to a large number would help researchers find new reasons why Saudi women use Twitter and Instagram differently to fulfill their needs. Additionally, future studies can advance the gratifications obtained through social media. In this case, the qualitative

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method would be an appropriate approach it would help to develop a deeper understanding of the motivations using Twitter. Because of the subtle changes of women’s positions in Saudi society, new research will focus on this phenomenon, which will provide more data to compare.

### **Conclusion**

Social media has impacted many aspects of life although Saudi Arabia is considered the number-one user of social media in the Arabic world. Both Twitter and Instagram have introduced new ways to communicate with others about various social events. They open new windows for individuals to get involved in these events virtually (Chaudhry, 2014). The aim of this paper is to understand the impact of both Twitter and Instagram on Saudi women and to attempt to understand the factors driving women to use Instagram and Twitter.

The findings from this study provide support to a significant amount of current literature and existing research on social media networks. The results of this study show gratifications in three ways: First, by allowing users to express their identities and be recognized (self-presentation), second, by enabling users to share and exchange information (information), and third, by being a source of pleasure and relaxation (entertainment). Examining the different ways Saudi women use Instagram and Twitter to share information, and the gratifications obtained from this platform, this study seeks to understand the impact of these two platforms and how social media use is evolving. Finally, Twitter users in Saudi Arabia seek to get news and be updated with society, and to provide a way to discuss social topics. Instagram users in Saudi Arabia provide entertainment and help women to be creative in new ways. The feature of Instagram to bring entertainment to users gives posters of photographs greater self-representation.



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