



Examining Social Stereotypes of Saudi Women in British and Saudi Media: A Comparative Analysis of Newly Obtained Women's Rights in Driving and Traveling

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of Saudi women in British and Saudi newspapers, focusing on their right to drive and travel freely. A comprehensive analysis of 25 articles from Al Riyadh, The Guardian, and The Times was conducted using van Leeuwen's social actor approach. The findings reveal that The Guardian and The Times diverge from traditional social stereotypes and emphasise progress, empowerment, and positive changes in the lives of Saudi women. However, some instances of socially stereotypical representations were found. Similarly, the Saudi newspapers depict Saudi women as powerful and intelligent individuals, countering the prevalent notion of passivity and oppression. This study contributes to understanding how media narratives can challenge or perpetuate social stereotypes, emphasising the importance of balanced and accurate portrayals that reflect the progress and agency of Saudi women, fostering inclusive and equitable societies.

Key words: *Saudi women's rights, media representation, social actor approach, stereotyping*

1. Introduction

In the last decade, Saudi women have made notable strides in politics and commerce (Parveen, 2021), reflecting efforts to empower them further. However, these changes or promises of change have not been sufficient for many Saudi women who aspire for more extensive freedoms. In 2026, the Vision 2030 offers a transformative outlook for Saudi women's empowerment (Alasgah & Rizk, 2023). With a strong emphasis on gender equality and inclusion, Vision 2030 seeks to promote greater opportunities, rights, and participation for Saudi women, driving societal progress and fostering a more inclusive and prosperous future. The vision for change provided renewed hope, and the issue of lifting the driving ban became one of the foremost questions posed to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He highlighted that the driving issue was primarily a cultural matter rather than a religious one. In June 2018, the public demands to lift the ban were finally met, and women were granted this long-awaited right. Similarly, women also voiced concerns regarding the travel restrictions imposed by the guardianship system, employing hashtags on

platforms like Twitter such as #TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship and #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen to express their demands for its relaxation. Prior to August 3, Saudi women were required to seek permission from their guardians and obtain an electronic pass to travel abroad. This requirement was part of the male guardianship system that governed various aspects of their lives. However, a significant breakthrough occurred on 3 August 2019 when women over the age of 21 were authorised to travel freely within and outside Saudi Arabia. They were also granted the right to obtain passports without the permission of their male guardian. These two issues to do with Saudi women's rights had been the subject of extensive debates within and outside Saudi Arabia for years. Consequently, the granting of these rights sparked discussions in the media. National and international news agencies extensively covered these historic changes for weeks.

The portrayal of Saudi women in the media has attracted significant attention from scholars and the public. Previous studies have examined how Saudi women are represented in various media platforms, including news articles, social media, and online content (Alenazy, 2018; Aljarallah, 2017; Altoaimy, 2017; Bashatah, 2017). These studies have utilised diverse methodologies, such as corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, to analyse the linguistic and discursive strategies employed in representing Saudi women. The lifting of the ban on women driving in 2018 represented a significant milestone in women's rights within Saudi Arabia and has been portrayed as a pivotal juncture in media depictions. Studies by Mishra (2007), Bashatah (2017), and Altohami and Salama (2019) highlight the stereotypical and negative portrayals of Saudi women in Western and Arab media, emphasising the importance of nuanced and diverse representations. These studies reveal that Saudi women are often depicted as oppressed victims seeking liberation solely through Western intervention, perpetuating one-dimensional and oversimplified narratives. Additionally, Guta and Karolak (2015), Sahly (2016), and Bahammam (2018) underscore the role of social media as a platform for Saudi women to challenge gender norms, advocate for their rights, and promote social change. The findings collectively emphasise the need for accurate and inclusive depictions of Saudi women, aiming to challenge gender inequalities and cultural biases in media representations.

2. Representation and Stereotypes

Van Leeuwen's 2008 work centres on the analysis of language and discourse to gain insights into the construction and maintenance of social stereotypes. By examining how certain groups are represented and discussed, van Leeuwen explores the embedding of stereotypes in our social interactions, which contributes to the perpetuation of inequality. Representation and stereotypes are interconnected concepts that significantly impact media and cultural discussions.

Representation refers to the portrayal of social groups in various forms of discourse, such as media and culture. It encompasses how these groups are depicted and influences societal perceptions. Representations can be positive or negative, subject to interpretation and negotiation among different groups. On the other hand, stereotypes are simplified and often exaggerated images or beliefs about a social group that circulate widely. Stereotypes tend to be

reductionist and may not capture the complexity and diversity within the group they depict. They can be harmful, reinforcing prejudice, discrimination, and inequality. Discourse analysis, particularly in media discourse, frequently employs the concept of representation. It involves the use of specific meanings within discourse to foster understanding and convey themes. However, it is essential to recognize that media information is not a direct reflection of reality and can be influenced by biases and distortions. Consequently, individuals need to critically evaluate media information and consult multiple sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of global events. Personal experiences and interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds also shape one's perspective, underscoring the need for a discerning approach to media.

Stereotypes are closely intertwined with how the media portrays individuals or events (Van Dijk, 1984; 2015). They are socially constructed categorisations that simplify actions and people, disregarding individual skills and the diversity within a group. The media's perpetuation of stereotypes can lead to discrimination, prejudice, and a lack of appreciation for diversity. Challenging and dismantling stereotypes is crucial for fostering inclusivity and respect for all individuals, irrespective of their social group identity. Analysing the representation in media, politics, and communication helps us understand how certain groups are portrayed and how this impacts societal attitudes and beliefs. This understanding can guide the efforts to promote more accurate and inclusive representations. The symbolic power of the media becomes evident in its portrayal of certain groups which can reinforce negative stereotypes and result in discrimination.

In summary, representation shapes how social groups are perceived, while stereotypes simplify and categorize identities. Discursive social stereotypes are constructed and perpetuated through communication, including everyday conversations, media representations, and cultural narratives. These stereotypes shape our perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards different social groups, often leading to prejudice and discrimination.

3. Previous Studies about Representations of Saudi Women in the Media

Saudi women have garnered significant global attention for various reasons over the years. One notable reason is their ongoing struggle for equal rights and freedom, which has persisted for decades. Another reason is the recent reforms implemented by the Saudi government to empower women and enhance their participation in various fields. However, these reforms have brought about tremendous changes within Saudi society, impacting women's experiences and their societal status as members and citizens of the country. Among these changes, a key aspect to consider is how women are currently represented in the media, news articles, and websites. Since the reign of King Salman, often referred to as the 'pre-driving era for women in Saudi Arabia', women have witnessed a significant shift and advancement in their roles within society and the political arena. A notable milestone occurred in 2018 when women were granted the right to drive in Saudi Arabia, marking a major achievement for women's rights in the country. Additionally, efforts have been made to increase women's participation in the workforce and politics through various initiatives and reforms.

A recent study by Harun et al. (2018) focused on the driving restrictions placed on Saudi women and analysed corpus data from Saudi and Arabic news sources, such as Al-Jazeera and BBC Arabic, from 2010 to 2014. The study explored how language was used to report on the struggles associated with the driving ban in Saudi Arabia. The findings, combined with critical discourse analysis, revealed that ideologies and political agendas significantly influence the portrayal of the women's driving ban issue in the two news outlets. Al-Jazeera utilized the religious and traditional social factors to validate the ban on women driving, while BBC Arabic emphasised the strict restrictions imposed on women in the country. Similarly, Mishra (2007) employed feminist criticism to analyse the representation of Saudi women in the American press and how American women were portrayed in the Saudi media. By utilizing post-colonial theory and critiquing Orientalism, Mishra compared the representations of Saudi women in the Washington Post with how American women were depicted in Arab newspapers. The study's results indicated that the Washington Post constructed Saudi women as negatively oppressed victims seeking liberation from Western countries. In contrast, Arab news highlighted Saudi women's resistance to the Westernization of their cultures and their choice to preserve their cultural integrity. Mishra's findings underscore the role of media in shaping the perceptions and understanding of different cultures and emphasised the need for a more nuanced and diverse representation of women in both Western and Arab media. Further research could explore how these representations impact the broader societal attitudes towards women from different cultures.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has proven to be a crucial tool for examining the representation of Saudi women in the media, by focusing on their associated social factors. Significant studies in this field include Adham's (2012) research on the 'iconic representation of women in the Middle East' and Alshakhs' (2012) study on 'Saudi Women's status through a Media Lens'. Adham examined how Saudi women were represented in the local media during the revolutionary wave of the Arab Spring in 2010, while Alshakhs explored the representation of Saudi women in local media outlets across three periods: before 9/11, after 9/11, and immediately after the reign of King Abdullah.

The previous literature has often portrayed Saudi society as highly sexist, predominantly influenced by patriarchal values that disadvantage women. However, recent changes in how women are treated have led to changes in their representation in the media. Nevertheless, some studies continue to highlight the persistence of stereotypical images of Saudi women from the past, which are perpetuated in the present generation. For instance, Bashatah (2017) investigated how four British newspapers (The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, the Daily Mail, and The Independent) represented Saudi women between 2005 and 2013. This study focused on two issues: opposition to the official ban on driving and the 2012 London Olympics. The analysis of written texts and pictures identified common linguistic frames, such as the conflicts surrounding the driving ban involving the Saudi government and residents. Saudi women were often depicted negatively, reinforcing British ideological perspectives concerning Muslim women. The study also revealed that journalists used extraneous images of veiled women that did not belong to the participants, symbolizing the Saudi women's subservience. These representations confirmed the global ideologies about Saudi women with a prominent negative discourse surrounding the hijab in media outlets.

In a recent study by Altohami and Salama (2019), Saudi women's portrayal in American media was analysed using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), a dataset spanning 1990 to 2017. Employing critical discourse analysis within a socio-cognitive framework, the study focused on themes like gender inequality, dress code, male custody, and the driving ban. The findings indicated predominantly negative portrayals of Saudi women in the corpus, situating them within a complex sociocultural context that exacerbated their issues. The study stressed the importance of journalists being more mindful of their depictions and aiming for accuracy. Notably, the researchers did not compare the COCA corpus with a reference corpus, missing potential insights.

Previous studies, such as those by Guta and Karolak (2015), Sahly (2016), and Bahammam (2018), have explored how Saudi women manage their identities on social media and how activists interpret discussions on women's rights and social change on platforms like Twitter. These studies employed various methodologies, from interviews to computer-assisted analysis, to categorize posts, identify trends, and underscore social media's role in public engagement and advocating for inclusivity, especially for marginalized groups. Contemporary research by Albawardi and Jones (2022) explored the representation of Saudi women driving in digital media following the lifting of the ban on female drivers in Saudi Arabia. The study employed van Leeuwen's visual representation framework to analyse the usage of images in various contexts. The findings revealed that the images predominantly presented generic and decontextualized portrayals, resulting in oversimplified and trivialized depictions of gender relations and social change in Saudi Arabia. The study critically evaluated the influence of commercial and political agendas on the portrayal of gender relations and social change in digital media.

In conclusion, this article delves into the representation of Saudi women in the media, specifically focusing on the role of social stereotypes. It highlights the ongoing struggle for equal rights and freedom faced by Saudi women, the recent reforms implemented to empower them, and the significant changes within Saudi society. Furthermore, it aims to address the gaps in the existing literature, as the prior research has primarily examined the lifting of the driving ban and women's freedom to travel as separate topics. This separation has limited our understanding of the interconnected dynamics and implications of these significant socio-cultural changes in Saudi Arabia.

The primary objective of this paper is to contribute to the existing literature by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the representation of Saudi women in both British and Saudi media, considering cross-cultural and linguistic perspectives. Specifically, the study aimed to investigate and analyse how Saudi women are portrayed in British and Saudi newspapers with a focus on the extent to which these representations either reflect or perpetuate social stereotypes. By examining two key issues related to Saudi women's rights, the study intended to evaluate whether the representations align with stereotypical portrayals or demonstrate progress in the media. The analysis involved a careful exploration and dissection of the data, considering factors such as social actors and their actions, to identify the nature of the representations and their potential to reinforce or challenge the existing stereotypes. The guiding research questions of this research are as follows:

RQ1: To what extent do the representations identified in British newspapers reflect or perpetuate social stereotypes about Saudi women, and what specific characteristics do they exhibit?

RQ2: To what extent do the representations identified in Saudi newspapers reflect or perpetuate social stereotypes about Saudi women, and what specific characteristics do they exhibit?

RQ3: How do the representations of Saudi women in British and Saudi newspapers compare in terms of their nature, characteristics, and adherence to social stereotypes?

4. Methodology

A total of 25 articles were gathered from the Lexis Library, an esteemed online database of British newspapers and official Saudi newspaper websites. Articles were selected based on the presence of search terms like 'Saudi women + driving' and 'Saudi women + traveling' in headlines and leading paragraphs, ensuring a focus on prominent coverage. Notably, Al Riyadh was a significant source among Saudi newspapers due to its broad readership and extensive coverage. The Guardian represented the British newspaper sector due to its substantial relevant articles. To maintain balance in political perspectives, The Times was also included, preventing bias and promoting comprehensive understanding. The article selection considered the timing of publication. For immediate reactions to significant announcements, articles had to be published within three days following the respective announcements. This approach allowed for a concentrated analysis of initial responses and subsequent discussions regarding the lifting of the driving ban and travel restrictions. Data collection began on September 26, 2017, for driving ban-related articles and on August 3, 2019, for travel restrictions-related articles. These timeframes ensured sufficient data for an in-depth analysis of immediate impact and public discourse on these developments in Saudi women's rights. The articles were imported into NVivo, specialised qualitative data analysis software, and subjected to analysis using codes derived from the discussed analytical framework. The analysis aimed to identify social actors, their attributed actions, the nature of representations, and potential stereotyping. Additionally, a comparative analysis explored variations in these representations between British and Saudi media.

The coding process adhered to van Leeuwen's (2008) principles of discursive representation. His socio-semantic inventory model, akin to Goffman's social portraiture concept, views discursive representations as recontextualized social practice. It highlights dimensions like inclusion/exclusion of social actors, roles portrayed (specific/generic, individual/group), and attributes facilitating categorization into social groups. Exclusion can involve suppression (complete absence) or backgrounding (implicit reference), while inclusion covers active and passive social actors. Nomination represents actors by their social identity, while categorization classifies them by social function. Genericization uses nonspecific references, while specification employs specifics.

The study focuses on the primary social actor, Saudi women, exploring embedded social stereotypes. The analytical method draws on van Leeuwen's socio-semantic inventory model, examining the inclusion/exclusion of social actors in articles. This approach highlights how Saudi women are depicted post-reforms. It scrutinizes linguistic choices and grammatical constructions positioning social actors in the discourse. 'Social actor' here refers to individuals

or groups involved in social practices or events. Van Leeuwen's (2008, p. 52) network approach assesses roles assigned to social actors, revealing shifts in portrayal and underlying social stereotypes and power dynamics within the discourse.

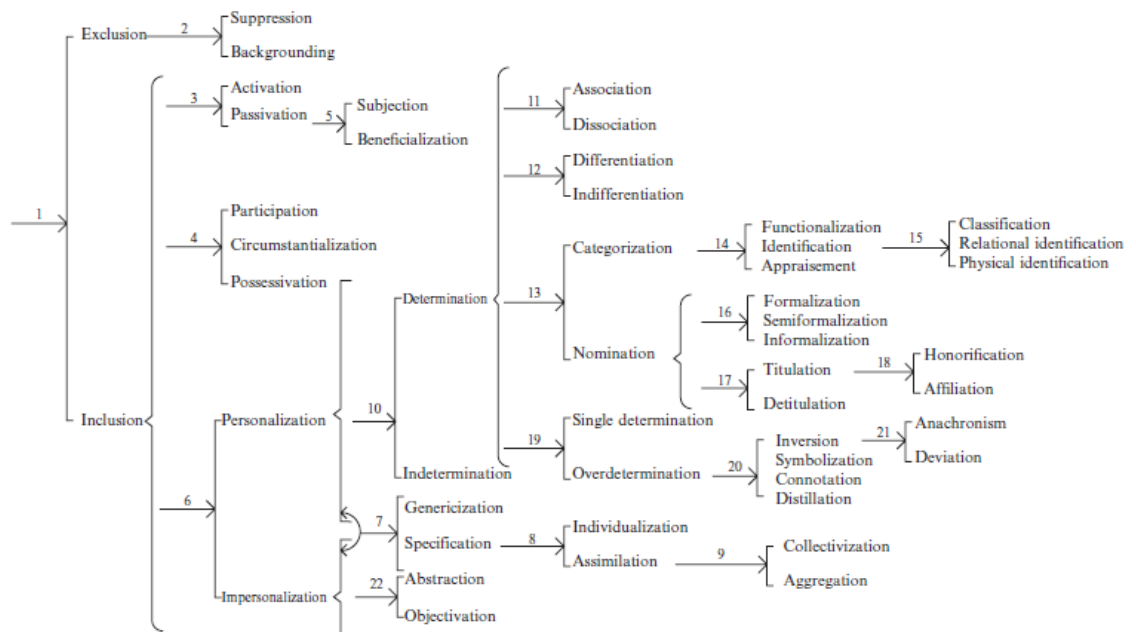


Figure 1. Social Actor Network (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 52)

The data collection process relied on specific search terms, with no intentional exclusion of references to Saudi women. Therefore, a separate section on exclusion analysis is not feasible. Instead, the findings primarily concentrate on Saudi women's inclusion. The layout addresses various aspects of Saudi women's representation. The findings section covers three main areas. First, it comprehensively analyses Saudi women's inclusion in *Al Riyadh* articles, examining how they are portrayed within these publications. Second, it explores inclusion strategies in representations of Saudi women in prominent British newspapers, *The Guardian*, and *The Times*. This section examines specific strategies used to depict Saudi women. Lastly, a comparative analysis investigates similarities and differences in Saudi women's representations between British and Saudi newspapers, identifying underlying factors shaping portrayals in these distinct media contexts.

5. Findings

5.1 Examining the inclusion of Saudi women in *Al Riyadh* Articles: A comprehensive analysis

The findings from *Al Riyadh* indicate that the inclusion strategy in their articles represents various social actors involved in specific social practices. The study focuses on categories such as activation, passivation, categorization, nomination, genericization, and specification within the framework of van

Leeuwen's theory. The data analysed revealed the active and/or passive inclusion of different social actors, with women, Saudi women, King Salman, and Prince Mohammed bin Salman being frequently mentioned across all articles. The research specifically targeted the representation of Saudi women as social actors. Al Riyadh presented the reactions of certain social actors to the recent announcements related to women's rights, and Al Riyadh additionally expressed gratitude towards the King and the crown prince for making these changes a reality. This study examines how Al Riyadh portrayed Saudi women in the collected articles and whether the representations reflect or perpetuate social stereotypes. The subsequent sections of this study elaborate on the representation of each type of included social actor found in the data. The study also acknowledges that not all types of inclusion were employed in all newspapers, which will be discussed in further detail. The study reveals that activated social actors are the most frequently used strategy in all data analysed. Al Riyadh employs a mixture of both foregrounded and backgrounded activation. Examples of foregrounded and activated social actors are provided, showcasing the representation of Saudi women in relation to driving and traveling. As shown in extract (1) and (2) there are no explicit social stereotypes regarding Saudi women.

(1) 'she said: There is also no doubt that history will preserve for King Salman and his crown prince - may God preserve them.' (Al Riyadh, Driving articles)

Backgrounded activated actors are often presented in the form of prepositional phrases, relative clauses, or possessive pronouns. Al Riyadh tends to utilize backgrounded activation more frequently than foregrounded activation. As in extract (2), Al Riyadh expresses that women have traditionally been valued, their honour has been prioritized, their feelings have been considered, and they have not been compelled to do things against their will. The statement does not explicitly indicate the presence or reinforcement of social stereotypes about Saudi women. However, it does convey a perception that the decision made on women's travel rights might not have a transformative impact in certain sections of Saudi society due to the cultural values and practices.

(2) 'A large part of Saudi society in which this decision will not change anything; Because they used to put the value of a woman in the forefront, honour her, take into account her feelings, and do not force her to do what she wants.' (Al Riyadh, Travelling articles)

Passivation is an approach used in Al Riyadh to include social actors which can be observed through two strategies: subjection and beneficialization. In terms of subjection, the social actors are depicted as undergoing the action, assuming a passive role. This passivation is often achieved through circumstantialization, using prepositional phrases like 'with', 'such as', or 'against'. The findings show that Al Riyadh employs the subjected passivation strategy more frequently compared to British newspapers. This suggests that individuals mentioned in Al Riyadh are portrayed as being subject to certain rights or regulations. Moreover, the extracts from Al Riyadh generally convey a positive tone, highlighting the rights granted to Saudi women and emphasising

how the government or relevant authorities have reinforced their roles and empowered them.

(3): 'To strengthen the role of the Saudi woman and to enable her to carry out her responsibilities in accordance with the legal regulations, and her capabilities that qualify her to occupy active positions in the structure of society.' (Al Riyadh, Driving articles)

In Al Riyadh, the beneficialization passivation strategy is commonly employed to portray social actors as the beneficiaries or receivers of certain actions. This strategy presents Saudi women as the recipients of positive benefits resulting from new announcements or granted rights. As seen in extract (4), these benefits are often linked to phrases like equality between men and women, empowerment, and enabling women to take on roles traditionally associated with men. While the British data also includes instances of including social actors as beneficiaries, the frequency and intentionality of such representations are less pronounced in comparison to the Saudi sources. The representation of Saudi women in Al Riyadh underscores the significance of acknowledging their rights and promoting gender equality.

(4) 'Positive reactions from all segments of society continued with the order to allow women to drive.' (Al Riyadh, Driving articles)

The use of nomination in Al Riyadh demonstrates variation across different categories, namely formalization, semi-formalization, and informalization. Formalization refers to the practice of referring to individuals solely by their last names which can be interpreted to emphasise their importance and recognition on a global scale. This usage suggests that these individuals hold significant roles or are widely known figures within society. In the context of social stereotypes, the formalization of certain individuals' names may contribute to their perceived authority, expertise, or influence. It can reinforce preconceived notions or expectations associated with these figures based on their reputation or societal standing. It is important to analyse these nominations critically and consider how they may shape or perpetuate existing social stereotypes. Through the mention of al-Maliki in extract (5), formalization can be seen as an example of how nomination is employed to highlight the role and achievements of specific individuals, including women. This use of nomination can challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes by acknowledging the contributions and capabilities of these individuals.

(5) 'Al-Maliki stated that it is not expected that there will be controls for women driving cars by setting a specific age or a specific time for their exit and return.' (Al Riyadh, Driving articles)

Semi-formalization is the most common category used in Al Riyadh. It involves the inclusion of both the first and last name of individuals, recognizing their identities and roles within the context discussed. Notable figures, including Rima Bint Bandar as in extract (6), are mentioned using this approach to convey their significance and contributions to promoting gender equality.

(6) 'Rima Bint Bandar said the Kingdom's leadership is committed to gender equality.' (Al Riyadh, Travelling articles)

Informalization, while less frequent than the other categories, is also present in Al Riyadh. By using only the first names of individuals, such as Dr Zainab in extract (7), a sense of intimacy and personal connection is created. This approach aims to humanize the individuals and establish a relatable narrative for the readers, highlighting their struggles, achievements, and empowerment.

(7) 'Dr Zainab added that the empowerment of Saudi women has many aspects, such as: appointing 30 elite Saudi women in the field of science and knowledge.' (Al Riyadh, Driving articles)

The use of categorization in Al Riyadh's articles, particularly through functionalization, provides insights into how social actors are represented based on their job or function. Compared to the nomination strategy, categorization appears to have a more limited presence in the articles. Functionalization involves referring to individuals using their job or professional titles. In the case of the provided extract, the lawyer Wad Al-Ruwais is mentioned along with her profession, creating a specific association between her role and expertise. This functional categorization contributes to a sense of formality and professionalism within the news reporting.

The use of functional categorization can shape social stereotypes by associating individuals with certain roles or functions. In the provided extract, the mention of a lawyer highlights the expertise and authority of Wad Al-Ruwais on the topic being discussed. This can reinforce societal expectations or assumptions regarding the role of professionals in providing insights or opinions on specific matters. Overall, the use of categorization, specifically functionalization, in Al Riyadh's articles allows for a clearer identification of the social actors based on their job or function. While this approach can contribute to a sense of formality and professionalism, it is important to critically analyse how such categorization may influence or reinforce social stereotypes related to certain roles or professions.

(8) 'The lawyer, Wad Al-Ruwais, considered that the first goal of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 is for our country to be a successful and pioneering model in the world at all levels.' (Al Riyadh, Travelling articles)

The analysis of the Al Riyadh newspaper reveals the prevalent use of genericization, where non-specific terms are employed to refer to social actors. In the case of the findings, the term 'woman' is frequently used without any specific association with individual women, used instead as a representation of an unidentified person or as a general reference to all women in Saudi Arabia. The use of genericization in the discourse analysed has implications for how the media perceives women as social actors. By employing non-specific terms, it can contribute to the formation of 'us' versus 'them' categorizations. This means that women are not portrayed as distinct individuals with unique experiences and perspectives but rather as a homogenous group. This approach may overlook the diversity and individuality of women in Saudi Arabia and reinforce stereotypes or generalizations about them. Extract (9) highlights the alignment of King Salman bin Abdulaziz's decision to allow women to drive according to the new political, economic, and cultural orientation of the Kingdom. However,

it does not specifically address the use of genericization or its impact on the representation of women. While the use of a general reference for women in this extract does not necessarily imply explicit social stereotypes, it does contribute to a broader representation of women as a collective group rather than recognizing their diverse identities and experiences. By using a general reference, individual women are not distinguished or acknowledged, potentially reinforcing a homogenous view of women in society.

(9) 'From here, we find that the decision issued by King Salman bin Abdulaziz, allowing women to drive a car, is in line with the new political, economic and cultural orientation of the Kingdom.' (Al Riyadh, Driving articles)

Contrary to the use of genericization, the analysis revealed the presence of individualization and the limited use of assimilation in the specification of social actors, particularly women. Individualization refers to portraying women as unique individuals with specific details, emphasising their distinct characteristics and experiences. The analysed text demonstrates instances of individualization, where specific women are depicted in a manner that distinguishes them from others. While assimilation involves referring to social actors as groups rather than focusing on individual persons. However, the use of assimilation was limited in the analysed data from Al Riyadh newspaper. While there were occasional general references to Saudi women, indicating a level of assimilation into a broader collective category, individualization was more prevalent. The emphasis was on highlighting specific women and their unique characteristics, enabling a more nuanced representation.

The predominance of individualization in the representation of social actors challenges potential stereotypes that may arise from genericization or assimilation. By portraying women as unique individuals with distinct qualities, the analysis promotes a more diverse and nuanced understanding of women's experiences and contributions (10). This approach counters the tendency to homogenize or overlook the individuality of women, promoting a more accurate and authentic representation.

(10) 'Dr Amani Al-Najem, who specializes in teaching methods and curriculum stated that women driving is a dream of some people and denied by other.' (Al Riyadh, Driving articles)

The analysis of Al Riyadh's representation of Saudi women invites a critical examination of whether these depictions reflect or perpetuate social stereotypes. The study findings indicate that Al Riyadh largely portrays Saudi women as active and empowered individuals, emphasising their rights and accomplishments. Through a comprehensive assessment, it was determined that the representations in the Al Riyadh articles did not perpetuate social stereotypes. While the use of genericization and the limited assimilation in these representations could potentially contribute to the reinforcement of societal divisions and stereotypes, the analysis did not reveal any instances of explicit or harmful social stereotypes in the data. It is important to recognize the efforts made by Al Riyadh in portraying Saudi women as active and empowered, highlighting their rights and achievements. The absence of social stereotypes is a positive aspect of the representations found in the articles. Nevertheless, the ongoing critical examination and analysis of media representations is necessary to ensure that the portrayal of Saudi women

remains free from harmful stereotypes and continues to evolve in a positive and inclusive direction.

5.2 Examining the inclusion strategies in the British newspaper representations of Saudi women: *The Guardian* and *The Times*

The Guardian and The Times present the reactions of certain social actors to the recent announcements regarding women's rights. The Guardian highlights the names of Saudi women activists who advocated for the right to drive, suggesting that the changes were driven by their efforts. The Times also includes references to Saudi women expressing their responses to these changes. Therefore, although women's names are recurrent in both newspapers' data sets, they represent different political and social perspectives. The activated social actor is the most frequently used strategy in all data analysed. The Times primarily employs foregrounded activation, while The Guardian utilizes a mixture of foregrounded and backgrounded activation. Examples of foregrounded and activated social actors are provided, showcasing the representation of Saudi women in relation to driving and traveling.

(11) 'Many women will no doubt benefit from driving to work and taking children to school.' (The Guardian, Driving articles)

Backgrounded activated actors are often presented through prepositional phrases, such as in the passive voice, or as premodifiers, post-modifiers, possessive pronouns, or nominalizations. The Guardian leans more towards foregrounded activation, while The Times predominantly uses foregrounded activation without backgrounded activation. These differences suggest variations in how social actors are included in the newspapers' reporting, possibly reflecting different journalistic values or practices. Extract (12) contains elements that reflect social stereotypes about women. Specifically, it implies that women in Saudi Arabia were previously limited in their freedom of movement and required permission from male guardians to travel or obtain a passport. This reinforces the stereotype of women as dependent and in need of male approval or control. The statement also suggests that the lifting of the ban on women driving and the ability to travel without male consent are seen of as victories for the Saudi feminist movement. While this may be a positive development, it still frames women's rights and freedoms as something to be granted or achieved, rather than as inherent entitlements. These representations contribute to the perpetuation of social stereotypes and reinforce gendered power dynamics.

(12) 'After the lifting of the ban on women driving last year, the Saudi feminist movement can now celebrate its second victory...' (The Guardian, Travel articles)

Overall, the analysis provides insights into the representation of social actors, particularly Saudi women, in British newspapers, highlighting variations in their portrayal and the potential adherence to social stereotypes. The data shows that British newspapers employ strategies of passivation, specifically subjection and beneficialization, to include social actors in their discourse. In terms of subjection, which involves presenting social actors as the passive recipients of actions, The Guardian tends to use this strategy more frequently compared to The Times. Extract (13) reflects a social stereotype

about women. It portrays women as being subjected to a ‘crushing guardianship system’ that implies a lack of autonomy and agency. The statement suggests that women are dependent on their male relatives for basic activities such as opening a bank account or traveling, reinforcing the stereotype that women are incapable of making decisions and needing permission or supervision from men. This representation perpetuates gender inequality and restricts women's rights and freedoms. On the other hand, extract (14) does not reflect a social stereotype about women. Instead, it highlights a positive development in Saudi Arabia, emphasising the significance of women being allowed to drive for the first time. The statement portrays this as a leap forward for human rights in the country, indicating progress and a positive change in the societal norms and policies. It does not perpetuate any negative or limiting stereotypes about women but rather focuses on the advancement of women’s rights and the recognition of their agency and freedom.

(13) ‘Women will continue to be subjected to a crushing guardianship system that forces them to seek permission from male relatives to do everything from opening a bank account to travelling.’ (The Times, Driving articles)

(14) ‘Saudi Arabia will allow women to drive for the first time, marking a leap forward for human rights in the ultraconservative country.’ (The Times, Driving articles)

On the other hand, beneficialization, which involves portraying social actors as the recipients or beneficiaries of actions, is a common strategy used in both The Guardian and The Times. In both newspapers, Saudi women are represented as the beneficiaries of certain rights, such as the right to drive, to travel without permission, and to have more control over family matters. However, the data suggests that The Guardian employs beneficialization passivation more frequently than The Times, indicating a difference in their editorial approach to presenting social actors. Overall, the findings indicate that the representation of Saudi women in British newspapers is influenced by contextual factors and the editorial perspectives of the respective newspapers. The data suggests that The Guardian prioritizes highlighting the actions and agency of social actors, emphasising their active roles rather than portraying them as passive recipients. Conversely, as in extract (15), The Times focuses more on reporting the situation and acknowledging the status quo, with fewer instances of the intentional inclusion of social actors as the beneficiaries of actions.

(15) ‘Saudi Arabia is the only country where women are banned from driving.’ (The Times, Driving articles)

Nomination strategies, encompassing formalization, semi-formalization, and informalization, are discernible in British newspapers, wherein these strategies are harnessed to acknowledge and accentuate the identities and roles of the social actors situated within the specific contexts being discussed. Within the domain of driving, The Guardian presents an excerpt elucidating the formalization strategy as in extract (16). This extract vividly demonstrates how formalization serves as a mechanism to recognize and ascribe significance to these individuals, elevating their status to that of global figureheads.

(16) ‘al-Sharif and another woman, Najla al-Hariri, became global figureheads’ (The Guardian, Driving articles)

Upon examining the findings from The Times and The Guardian, it becomes apparent that British newspapers have a restricted utilisation of categorisation strategies, particularly functionalisation and identification. The British data contained only five instances of categorization. The British articles identified two types of categorizations. The first type was classification, which involves distinguishing individuals based on attributes like age, gender, race, and origin. This form of categorization was found in three references within the British articles. Relational identification, another subcategory of categorization, was minimally observed in the data. The use of categorization and identification in media discourse can have both positive and negative effects. While it can perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to discrimination, it can also provide valuable information and context. Media outlets should be mindful of the impact of language choices and strive for accuracy and inclusivity.

(17) “‘It means a lot to me and about time,” said Azzah, a woman in her mid-30s.’ (The Guardian, Travelling articles)

The study identifies the presence of genericization, where the term ‘woman’ is used as a non-specific reference. While this may be for practical reasons, such as brevity when reporting the news, it also has implications for how Saudi women are perceived as a group. The lack of specificity can contribute to ‘us’ versus ‘them’ categorizations and reinforce social divisions. The analysis also reveals individualization as a prevalent strategy, highlighting specific women and their unique characteristics and experiences. This approach humanises Saudi women and showcases their individual agency, challenges, and achievements. Extract (18) provides information about specific aspects of women's rights and driving regulations in Saudi Arabia without perpetuating social stereotypes.

(18) ‘While a woman can be granted a licence and is allowed to drive, a male family member can still stop her from doing so.’ (The Guardian, Driving articles)

British newspapers employ individualization and limited assimilation in the specification of social actors. The focus is more on individualization, emphasising the distinctiveness of Saudi women in The Guardian and The Times. In the British data, individualisation is used specifically when referring to activist women or a girl who escaped from Saudi Arabia. This may suggest that women activists are acknowledged for their achievements in the context of advocating for women’s rights. British articles employ individualisation to include references to activists, like the name of a girl who fled from Saudi Arabia, highlighting their contributions, whether directly or indirectly, to the recent changes. This suggests the recognition of women activists for their achievements in advocating for women’s rights. The use of individualisation highlights their contributions to recent changes. As seen in extracts (19) and (20), the extracts provide insights into the activism, opinions, and experiences of the individuals involved in the women’s driving movement without perpetuating social stereotypes. The mention of *Manal al-Sharif’s* activism and her experience of being imprisoned for driving underscores her role and commitment to advocating for change and challenging the societal norms. This

portrayal highlights her agency, resilience, and determination, and it does not perpetuate negative stereotypes about Saudi women. Instead, it recognizes her individual contributions and activism.

(19) ‘In response to the announcement, Manal al-Sharif, who became the public face of the campaign, after she was imprisoned for driving, tweeted: “Today the last country on earth to allow women to drive.”’ (The Guardian, Driving articles)

(20) ‘Manal al-Sharif, an activist who started the women's campaign to drive in 2011 and has been jailed several times.’ (The Times, Driving articles)

The British articles use assimilation to describe the specific events and actions taken by Saudi women to protest the driving ban in Saudi Arabia. The following extracts do not directly exhibit social stereotypes regarding Saudi women. Rather, they offer a range of viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives pertaining to the topic. Extracts (21) and (22) emphasise the collective actions, obstacles, and accomplishments of the women engaged in driving-related activism, contributing to a more varied and inclusive representation of the subject. These extracts provide insights into the agency and progress of the women challenging societal norms without reinforcing preconceived stereotypes.

(21) ‘In November 1990, 47 Saudi women drove their cars around Riyadh to protest the driving ban. They faced severe punishment at the time and the campaign died away until 2008.’ (The Guardian, Driving articles)

(22) ‘We did it’ (The Times, Driving articles)

Based on the findings, the representations of Saudi women in British newspapers (The Guardian and The Times) do not overwhelmingly perpetuate social stereotypes. Instead, they highlight the agency, activism, and individual experiences of Saudi women, particularly those involved in advocating for women's rights and driving. The inclusion of activists like Manal al-Sharif showcases their contributions and challenges the stereotypes that may exist about Saudi women being passive or oppressed. The individualization strategy used in these representations humanizes Saudi women and emphasises their distinctiveness, avoiding generalizations or negative stereotypes. However, it is important to note that some extracts do contain elements that reflect or reinforce social stereotypes. For example, extract (13) from The Times portrays women as being subjected to a ‘crushing guardianship system’, dependent on male relatives for various activities. This perpetuates the stereotype of women as passive and needing male approval or control. Similarly, extract (12) from The Guardian suggests that the lifting of the ban on women driving and the ability to travel without male consent are seen of as victories for the Saudi feminist movement, framing women’s rights, and freedoms as something to be granted rather than inherent entitlements. Overall, while there are instances where social stereotypes are present in the representations, the findings suggest a nuanced portrayal of Saudi women in British newspapers with a focus on individual agency and activism rather than reinforcing negative stereotypes.

5.3 Comparative analysis of the representations of Saudi women in British and Saudi newspapers: Exploring the similarities and differences

The representations of Saudi women in British and Saudi newspapers exhibit both similarities and differences. All newspapers frequently mention women, Saudi women, King Salman, and Prince Mohammed bin Salman as social actors in their articles, indicating a shared recognition of prominent figures involved in discussions on women's rights in Saudi Arabia. The activation strategy, aimed at highlighting the social actors, is employed by all newspapers. However, differences arise in the specific focus and perspectives of the representations.

The British newspapers sampled, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, emphasise progress, empowerment, and positive changes in the lives of Saudi women. They highlight women's achievements, such as advocating for the right to drive and presenting their reactions to recent announcements regarding women's rights. In contrast, the Saudi newspaper, *Al Riyadh*, expresses gratitude towards the King and the Crown Prince for implementing these changes and highlights the increasing independence and recognition of women's rights in Saudi Arabia. *Al Riyadh's* representations align more closely with the official discourse and reflect the societal values that prioritize the role and honour of women. Variations can be observed in the usage of activation strategies. *The Times* employs the foregrounded activation approach more frequently, presenting the social actors as actors, assigners, or sayers. *Al Riyadh* relies more on backgrounded activation where the social actor occurs in prepositional phrases or modifiers. *The Guardian* employs a combination of both approaches. These differences in activation strategy suggest there to be divergent journalistic practices and values among the newspapers.

The analysis of *Al Riyadh's* representations indicates that they largely portray Saudi women as active and empowered individuals, emphasising their rights and accomplishments. Through a comprehensive assessment, it is determined that these representations in *Al Riyadh* articles do not perpetuate social stereotypes. While the use of genericization and limited assimilation in these representations may contribute to reinforcing societal divisions and stereotypes, the analysis did not reveal any instances of explicit or harmful social stereotypes in the data. In contrast, the representations of Saudi women in British newspapers, such as *The Guardian* and *The Times*, highlight the agency, activism, and individual experiences of Saudi women. These newspapers showcase the contributions of activists like Manal al-Sharif, challenging stereotypes of Saudi women as passive or oppressed. The individualization strategy employed in these representations humanises Saudi women and emphasises their uniqueness, avoiding generalizations or negative stereotypes. However, it is important to note that some extracts in British newspapers do contain elements that reflect or reinforce social stereotypes. For example, there are instances where women are portrayed as dependent on male relatives or where women's rights are framed as victories to be granted rather than inherent entitlements.

Overall, the findings suggest a nuanced portrayal of Saudi women in British newspapers with a focus on individual agency and activism rather than perpetuating negative stereotypes. While *Al Riyadh's* representations of Saudi women are largely empowering and non-stereotypical, the ongoing critical

examination and analysis of media representations is necessary to ensure that the portrayal of Saudi women remains free from harmful stereotypes and continues to evolve in a positive and inclusive direction.

6. Final Discussion and Conclusion

This research aimed to examine and analyse the representations of Saudi women in British and Saudi newspapers, with a focus on whether these representations reinforce or challenge social stereotypes. The findings reveal that the inclusion of social actors, particularly women, reflects different ideologies and encompasses both internal and external perspectives. Activation strategies were widely employed in all data sets, with women frequently depicted as active and influential social actors. British newspapers primarily utilized foregrounded activation, while Saudi newspapers relied more on backgrounded activation. Passivation strategies, such as subjection and beneficialization, were present but less prominent. Both Al Riyadh and British articles depicted Saudi women as beneficiaries, with the latter also employing subjection passivation. The presence of Saudi women was often emphasised through their names, functions, and roles, highlighting their active participation and empowerment. Categorization strategies varied, with Al Riyadh articles primarily focusing on functionalization, showcasing Saudi women in high positions. This representation challenges the stereotype of Saudi women as passive and oppressed, instead emphasising their agency and contributions to their communities. It promotes gender equality and encourages recognition and respect for women's capabilities. These findings align with the research conducted by Elyas et al. (2021), who studied the representation of Saudi women in 17 Saudi newspapers and magazine articles during the pre-driving timeframe using SAA. They discovered that nearly all articles represented Saudi women as active participants in various fields, highlighting their identity and societal roles. Furthermore, the representation of Saudi women by referring to their jobs and social duties, such as businesswomen, lawyers, and Shura consultants, reflects the underlying ideology behind these references. Genericization was commonly employed in all data sets, grouping Saudi women under a single term that may limit their diversity and individual experiences. While Saudi newspapers predominantly portrayed Saudi women in a positive and active light, British articles occasionally highlighted gender inequality and the suppression of freedom of expression, attributing recent changes to activists advocating for women's rights. These findings support the research of Adham (2012), who represented Saudi women in a wide range of positions in Middle Eastern media. In summary, both British and Saudi newspapers predominantly portray Saudi women in a positive light, challenging traditional social stereotypes and promoting gender equality. These representations reflect the increasing participation of Saudi women in various domains and emphasise their agency, contributions, and achievements.

For future research, it is crucial to examine whether newspapers worldwide share similar or different views about Saudi women. This investigation could shed light on whether negative representations of Saudi women are a global phenomenon or specific to certain regions. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore the impact of these representations on the perceptions and experiences

of Saudi women, both within their own country and internationally. Another important aspect to consider is studying people's attitudes towards the rights gained by women in Saudi Arabia. This research angle can provide insights into whether the representations accurately reflect the progress made by Saudi women in terms of their rights and empowerment. It can also help evaluate the effectiveness of these representations in promoting positive societal attitudes towards women in Saudi Arabia.

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