

Understandings and Experiences of Sports, Physical Activity and Related Digital Campaigning Among Saudi Young Women in Saudi Arabia

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Abstract

This thesis explores the way social media sports campaigning contributes to Saudi women's understandings of physical activity and sports in relation to gender norms in Saudi Arabia. It also investigates how these campaigns are received by Saudi women who are exposed to these activist messages. Through eight focus group discussions with 32 female university students at King Abdul-Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, this study explores the participants' understandings and experiences of physical activity and sports. It also examines their views about digital campaigning. Furthermore, through 11 semi-structured interviews that used the scroll-back method, this study explores the participants' personal experiences of social media use and of different forms of digital sports campaigns in relation to femininity and dress codes.

The study identifies the role of place, Islam, traditions and society's beliefs, family influence and structural issues, and the intersections of these issues in relation to Saudi women's understandings and experiences of physical activity and sports. It suggests that the way in which Saudi young women understand physical activity and sports is not entirely dictated by these issues; rather they are exerting their agency in ways that enable them to counter or negotiate these influences. The study also shows how digital sports campaigning is significant for Saudi women at a personal and individual level. In particular, social media influencers, celebrities, and sportswomen seem to be critically important in contributing to the understanding of femininity and dress codes. The study overall is contributing to scholarship on intersectional feminism, particularly in the Saudi Arabian context. It illuminates the way intersectionality works in shaping experiences and understandings of digital campaigning in Saudi Arabia.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in the importance of social media platforms for campaigning purposes, offering citizens fresh avenues to connect, collaborate, and actively engage in matters that hold public significance (Graham et al, 2016). Feminist activists have also acknowledged the significance of these platforms as spaces for their activism (Clark, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, there has been a noticeable rise in the utilisation of social media by a growing community of feminists. They have embraced this powerful platform to express their viewpoints, shed light on their challenges, and bring awareness to the pressing social concerns they find relevant (Abdullatif, 2013; Hurley, 2019; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018). One of these issues is engagement with physical activity (PA) and sports (Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa, 2020).

Existing literature around women's social media activism on PA and sports, whether published in Western countries or in the Eastern world, mainly focuses on how women use social media platforms as a medium through which they can challenge dominant stereotypes and cultural gender norms around the topic (Rahbari, 2019; Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). However, little is known about how this form of activism contributes to an understanding of PA and sports in relation to gender norms and how it is being received by women who are exposed to these activist messages.

This introductory chapter is divided into eight sections. The first four sections will introduce the scope of the study and its core theoretical background. This part will cover Saudi Arabia's culture, Islam, and women's sports; digital activism; digital feminist activism; and digital

activism, sportswomen and social media influencers. The fifth section will present the research questions, as well as the contributions this study makes to existing research. The sixth section will discuss the reasons that persuaded me to embark on the topic discussed. The section will end with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2. Saudi Arabian Culture, Islam, and Women's Sports

The health benefits of PA and sports have been frequently documented. Regular PA has been proven to increase longevity and reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, stroke, and various types of cancer (Lu et al, 2014). Sport is also important for weight control and the prevention of obesity. In addition, studies have shown that PA enhances mental health by alleviating symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (Alahmed and Lobelo, 2018). Despite the well-known benefits of regular PA and sports for health and well-being, the levels of PA and sports among Muslim girls and women remain low (Sharara et al, 2018). In fact, findings from a recent national survey among Saudi adults aged 15 to 24 showed that 42% of men and 76% of women did not meet the WHO-recommended guidelines of 150 minutes per week of moderate activity and 75 minutes per week of vigorous activity (Moradi-Lakeh et al, 2016). Within the sociology of health, physical education (PE), and sporting literature, considerable attention has been paid to the barriers to PA and sports (e.g., Jiwani and Rail, 2010; Sfeir, 1985; De Knop et al, 1996; Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Walseth, 2006; Khan et al, 2012; Walseth, 2015). Early research listed cultural and religious traditions, as well as structural limitations among these barriers (Knez et al, 2012; Jiwani and Rail, 2010). A study conducted by Benjamin and Donnelly (2013) found that the lower level of PA among Saudi females is more likely to be the result of social and cultural variables rather than their physical capacity to undertake such activities. These factors include the code of wearing traditional dress (e.g.,

abaya) outside the home which restricts freedom of movement, discouragement coming from family members, and having domestic helpers to do household chores (Benjamin and Donnelly, 2013).

Despite these barriers, recent PE and PA studies have begun to consider individual experiences as opposed to those of groups (e.g., Stride, 2016). Within these studies, the theoretical focus moves away from exploring structural oppression and inequalities to recognising the agency of women and girls in constructing their identities and navigating power relations (Stride, 2016). For instance, research by Palmer (2009) and Thorpe et al (2020) showed how women demonstrated their agency in navigating the influence of hijab discourses through their resourcefulness and creativity in creating appropriate places such as their homes and female-only environments where they enjoy PA with no need to worry about patriarchal reprisal when they remove their clothing.

These studies, however, have drawn attention away from group experiences that underscore the enduring nature of discrimination (Stride, 2016). Therefore, this thesis acknowledges the individual narratives, but it also remains conscious of broader structural and cultural influences when it comes to understanding Saudi women's experiences of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia (Knez et al, 2012; Stride, 2016).

1.3. Digital Activism

Within the last few years, digital activism has emerged as a popular topic in academic circles and beyond (Kaun and Uldam, 2018). Joyce (2010) relates digital activism "both to the digital technology that is used in a given activism campaign and to the economic, social and political context in which such technology use occurs" (P. 2). According to Karatzogianni (2015), digital

activism should be understood as "political participation, activities and protests organised in digital networks beyond representational politics" (Karatzogianni, 2015, p.1). It relates to political conduct by non-state actors and the creation of new social and political formations, including social movements, protest organisations, and civil society organisations, which are independent of government and corporate influence and aim to reform or revolutionise society (Karatzogianni, 2015).

Scholars across various fields, such as sociology, anthropology, political science, media studies, and communication studies, have dedicated increasing attention to the study of digital activism. This emerging area of research explores the intersection of technology and social movements, encompassing a wide range of academic disciplines (e.g., Karatzogianni, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2017). Although this study has garnered considerable attention and become widely embraced, it has not been immune to criticism. Kaun and Uldam (2018), for instance, raised the excessive emphasis on technology and the lack of attention given to ideological shifts and the socio-political environment that shaped the emergence of digital activism. Gerbaudo (2017) raised doubts about the widespread acceptance of technological deterministic viewpoints and instead advocated for an ideological examination of digital activism, offering valuable insights from both a political and contextual standpoint. However, according to Kaun and Uldam (2018), even with this perspective, there is a risk of overlooking the unique features of activism across various media and formats (Kaun and Uldam, 2018).

For Kaun and Uldam (2018), it is of utmost importance to perceive technology as an integral part of the culture, examining it within the framework of social and political structures rather than treating it as entirely detached. This approach prompted them to explore digital technologies as a combination of "technical artifacts, communicative practices, and

institutional arrangements" (p. 2102). As material artifacts or devices, these emerging technologies have enhanced individuals' capacity to engage and exchange ideas, with activists developing methodologies through these material artifacts within established institutions and civic cultures (Kaun and Uldam, 2018). Just as activism has evolved and adapted to social circumstances, technology, including digital media, has also followed suit. This has allowed for the shaping of the nature and structure of digital technologies in alignment with the prevailing social, economic, and political milieu, simultaneously transforming the terrain for self-expression, political engagement, and activism (Kaun and Uldam, 2018).

In their 2013 study on the Arab Spring uprisings, Wolfsfeld and his colleagues echoed a similar viewpoint, underscoring the significance of adopting "contextualism" to analyse digital activism. They argued that when studying social media's role in social movements, it is crucial to prioritise politics both analytically and chronologically. Neglecting the political landscape in which it emerged and functioned would be an oversight. Wolfsfeld and his colleagues (2013) examined two key factors: the extent of individuals' unrestricted and uncensored access to social media and their level of motivation to engage in street demonstrations.

Consequently, this study suggests the importance of context to better understand social media's role in promoting social change. This study will fall squarely into this category as it is particularly interested in how contextual aspects contribute to women's understandings of digital campaigning around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia.

1.4. Digital Feminist Activism

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Given the growing popularity of social media platforms, such as social networking sites, it comes as no surprise that young girls and women began to enthusiastically embrace and utilise these platforms for activism (Clark, 2015). This is not a recent phenomenon, as

feminists have consistently employed various mediums such as media, popular culture, and the Internet as powerful tools for their activism (Jackson, 2018; Harris, 2010). During the early 1990s, the Riot Grrrl movement emerged, establishing a fresh perspective known as "girl-centred feminism". This approach emphasises the concepts of 'grrrlpower' 'sassiness,' and 'autonomy' (Jackson, 2018). Initially originating in the United States, the Riot Grrrl movement swiftly gained momentum and transformed into a global phenomenon, spreading to numerous countries worldwide (Dunn, 2014). The Riot Grrrl movement sparked the creation of inclusive spaces known as "grrl-spaces," where individuals could express their opposition within popular culture. These spaces encompassed various forms such as fanzines, webpages, and punk rock music (Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2012). In the context of the digital era, contemporary feminism evolved to embrace a distinct characteristic, providing platforms for individuals to connect and share their concerns, emotions, including anger, and critiques (Jackson, 2018).

According to Harris (2008, p. 482), modern technologies were crucial for enabling political participation for young people as these have created "new directions" for activism, particularly for young women. These include blogs and hashtags, YouTube videos, Tumblr and mobile phone apps (Loney-Howes, 2020; Jackson, 2018). This "new direction" in feminism, had been referred to as the "fourth wave" (Munro, 2013). The fourth wave of feminism is still evolving; however, some scholars have argued that it was influenced by the ideas of the third wave of feminism which focused on micropolitics and challenging sexism and misogyny (Munro, 2013). Bruene and Capous-Desyllas (2020) characterised the "fourth wave" as having a "focus on various women through an intersectional lens" (p. 92).

Intersectionality is observed as "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Stride, 2016, p. 681). It acknowledged the significance of individual multiple identities and the broader social structures while recognising how these different levels intersect, leading to power relations, differences, and discrimination (Stride, 2016). Baer (2016) argued that digital technologies served as a "space where feminists can learn from each other about why things some feminists see as harmless can be hurtful and offensive to others. Most feminists know about intersectionality, but far from all of us know every way in which intersectional oppression works" (Baer, 2016, p. 18). By bringing together various feminist constituencies, digital technologies have been described as facilitating new sorts of intersectional conversations (Baer, 2016). Accordingly, this thesis highlights the importance of intersectional feminism, as a key to a better exploration of feminist activism on social media on issues of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia.

1.4.1. Hashtag Feminism

In exploring the relationship between digital media and feminist activism, the term hashtag activism has become one of the most interesting developments (Yang, 2016). The term hashtag activism first appeared in news coverage in 2011 and was described as "the creation and proliferation of online activism stamped with a hashtag" (Jackson et al, 2020, p. 32). A hashtag, designed by a 'hash' symbol (#), was defined as "a keyword assigned to information that describes a tweet and aids in searching" (Small, 2011, p. 872). Hashtag (#) was mostly associated with Twitter, but it was increasingly applied to many online communities such as Instagram (Gilkerson and Berg, 2017).

The number of studies exploring the role of hashtags in feminist activism has increased in recent years (e.g., Clark, 2016; Meyer, 2014; Horeck, 2014; Thrift, 2014; Rentschler, 2015; Linabary et al, 2020). These scholars emphasised the potential of feminist hashtags such as #YesAllWomen, #SafetyTipsForLadies, and #Whylstayed to expose gendered violence and abuse. They highlighted the distinctiveness of hashtags in their capacity to enhance the visibility of feminist concerns and offer instant responses to real-time events (Linabary et al, 2020). According to these researchers, this increased visibility facilitated the creation and amplification of alternative narratives within online environments (Linabary et al, 2020).

In the hashtag #YesAllWomen, for example, women's personal stories of gender-based violence fought "exceptionalist discourses" surrounding the Isla Vista killings (Thrift, 2014, p. 1091). Accordingly, the hashtag was not only praised for making visible women's lived experiences following the tragedy of Isla Vista, but it also served as a space for "critical, feminist intervention in how we conceptualised and chose to narrate misogynist aggression and gender violence in American culture" (Thrift, 2014, p. 1091). This is made feasible, in part, by the fact that hashtags, in addition to being searchable, can also become highly visible through mechanisms for detecting "trending" hashtags on social media platforms, which can be covered by established or traditional media as news stories in themselves (Linabary et al, 2020; Latina and Docherty, 2014).

Hence, considering the potential of hashtags to enhance the visibility of specific concerns, a crucial aspect of this study is to explore how Saudi young women perceive hashtag activism as a tool for advocating personal and societal transformation in their sports and PA campaigns.

1.4.2. Digital Feminist Activism in Saudi Arabia

In the past few years, many feminists in Saudi Arabia have turned to hashtags as powerful spaces to raise their voices, share their opinions and struggles, as well as to put the spotlight on feminist issues, such as #Women2Drive - to demand the right to drive, #EndMaleGuardianship - to end the male guardianship system (Abdullatif, 2013; Hurley, 2019; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018). Indeed, in Saudi Arabia, the #EndMaleGuardinship campaign was historical, leading to King Salman issuing a decree in 2017 to review the male guardianship system and eliminating some of its provisions which have now allowed women to access all services (e.g., obtain a passport, study, travel, work, accessing healthcare, etc.,) without the need of permission from a male guardian. The other famously successful campaign was #Women2Drive in which the Saudi government granted women the right to drive in 2018 (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). In both campaigns, the use of social media and hashtags were crucial in mobilising women. The direct sharing of the Human Rights Watch Report to the Saudi King's Twitter account and posting videos of the abuse women suffered from their male guardians attracted public attention, were covered by mainstream media, and, eventually, paved the way for reforms on Saudi women's social status at a fast pace (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019).

Within the sports domain, there was also evidence that social media brought about a new way for Saudi women to speak on a wide range of issues that affected their sport participation in Saudi Arabia. One example was the launching of an online campaign called *LetHerGetFat* which blamed Saudi authorities for the lack of access to women-only gyms for those who prefer to do their physical exercises in places outside their homes, given that they were not allowed to use facilities used by men (Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa and Leber, 2018).

Moreover, hashtags such as *#RunningAbays* were used by activist groups in Saudi Arabia to promote the culture of PA and sports, particularly among Saudi women (Abdullatif, 2013; Hurley, 2019; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018; Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa, 2020).

1.5. Digital Activism, Sportswomen and Social Media Influencers

Social media has the capacity not only to enhance the exposure of social causes on both individual and collective levels but also to offer a platform for historically marginalised individuals to express their perspectives and be acknowledged (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). This holds particularly true for Muslim women who are actively striving to reshape societal perceptions of themselves, amidst the prevalence of Islamophobia, racism, and sexism (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). "Self-representation" is now more known to refer to "the activities of participating audiences in digital culture, alongside other related terms like the performance of self and presentation of self and most recently, self-revelation" (Thumim, 2012, p. 6). Research focusing on self-representation has indicated that individuals utilise social media platforms as a means to achieve recognition or popularity (Marwick, 2015). Meanwhile, alternative studies have centred their attention on examining self-representation in relation to the wearing of the hijab (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018), as well as self-representation and sexuality (Tiidenberg and Gomez Cruz, 2015).

In the context of sports and PA, an increasing number of studies are looking at how athletes, sportswomen, and social media influencers were using social media to gain greater visibility and as forms of digital sports activism (e.g., Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b; Chawansky, 2016). Within these studies, the focus has been given to the term "self-branding" and its link to gender discourses which highlight personal choices, self-

expression, and independence (Duffy and Hund, 2015). Gill (2007) highlighted the similarity between post-feminism and neoliberalism in terms of encouraging individuals to "render one's life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice and autonomy" (p. 154). In examining its narrative's linkage with digital media, Banet-Weiser (2012) noted that post-feminism and interactivity make self-branding crucial. Interactivity, along with post-feminism, created a 'neoliberal moral framework' that encouraged self-branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 56). In girls and young women, this self-brand is created through bodily display, authentic narratives, and cultivation of affect (Duffy and Hund, 2015).

1.5.1. Self-Branding and Physical Activity/Sport Media Influencers in Saudi Arabia

Currently, there exists a scarcity of scholarly literature that delves into the exploration of Middle Eastern sports influencers, particularly those from Saudi Arabia, and their utilisation of social media platforms for self-branding purposes. A previous study conducted by Ahmad (2019) shed light on the use of social media by sportswomen in the Middle East and North Africa region, with a specific focus on countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Iran. Ahmad (2019) The research discovered that social media platforms offered distinctive avenues for Saudi sports influencers to establish their self-brand and self-presentation by themselves, effectively garnering attention for both themselves and their sports. Moreover, these influencers utilised social media as a means to raise awareness and empower other Saudi women. Ahmad (2019) The study also revealed that Saudi sports influencers displayed thoughtful consideration in crafting and sharing content with their audience, prioritising cultural matters as a central aspect of their decision-making process.

Accordingly, an important part of this thesis will focus on how Saudi young women experience and understand Saudi and other social media influencers and their online self-representation and self-branding.

1.6. Research Questions and Contribution to the Field

The first research question to be addressed in this thesis is:

RQ 1: How do Saudi women understand and experience physical activity and sports? Do they see any potential challenges in engaging with them?

In the first focus of the present study, the aim is to explore Saudi women's understandings of PA, sports, and space. In addition, the research aims to explore the factors that seem to shape women's experiences of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. While most of the existing studies that focused on understanding physical inactivity among Muslim girls and women have shown the important role that cultural and religious traditions, as well as structural factors, played in Muslim women's sport participation (e.g., Knez et al, 2012), other studies have begun to recognise the agency of women and girls in constructing their identities and navigating power relations (e.g., Stride, 2016). However, little attention has been paid to recognising the concept of intersectionality as key in exploring the way Saudi women understand and experience PA and sports.

The second research question to be addressed in the thesis is:

RQ 2: How do Saudi women understand digital campaigning targeting women around physical activity and sports in Saudi Arabia?

The second aim of the study is to provide insight into how digital campaigns targeting women around PA and sports are being received by Saudi women who are exposed to these activist messages. Therefore, the aim is to add to the understanding of online campaigns organised by governmental and non-governmental organisations, online sports and fitness personalities, and social media influencers. Much of the existing literature about digital activism within Western countries and in the Eastern world (e.g., Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b) has mainly focused on how social media platforms in recent years have been used in feminist campaigns, which paved the way to advocate for individual and collective social change concerning women's sports. However, such literature has usually not taken into consideration the importance of context in the analysis of social media as channels for social change.

Finally, the research will explore the third research question:

RQ 3: How and why do Saudi women use social media? How do Saudi women understand the role of social media influencers, celebrities, and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes?

The research in its final focus will further examine Saudi women's everyday social media practices and their views on digital campaigning. The research aims to discuss, in more specific terms, Saudi women's experiences of social media influencers, celebrities, and sportswomen, particularly around issues related to feminine beauty ideals and dress codes on social media. Most existing literature examining how celebrity athletes and sportswomen use social media as a form of sports activism, both in Muslim and non-Muslim contexts, has found social media to be a valuable tool for showing aspects of everyday life, resisting stereotypes, and a myriad of cultural gender norms regarding women's sports (e.g., Rahbari, 2019; Ahmad and

Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). Yet, despite the growing body of literature focused on women's social media activism in sports, little research has yet explored Saudi women's personal experiences of celebrity athletes and sportswomen, particularly around feminine beauty ideals and dress codes.

1.7. Research Motivation: Why This Topic?

Certain motivations have led the researcher to approach this topic. The primary trigger is personal. Firstly, my initial interest in this area arose from a young age. Being myself a sports person, I enjoy going to the gym and preparing and cooking healthy food. In addition, I have a degree from the College of Education in Jeddah, Department of Nutrition and Food Science. After that, I worked for a year, in 2009, in the Nutrition Department of one of the well-known hospitals in my hometown. In 2017, I conducted a MA project on the role that mass media plays in influencing public attitudes toward genetically modified and organic foods. After my MA degree I kept investigating similar subject areas to what I conducted before, but this time in understanding how young women perceive the role of digital campaigning around issues related to PA and sports in Saudi Arabia.

Another reason behind conducting such a project, particularly concerning women's sports in Saudi Arabia rests on the fact that as I mentioned in my thesis, a growing number of young people, particularly females, suffer from diabetes and obesity as a result of inactivity (Sharara et al, 2018; Al-Hazzaa, 2018). Therefore, it is important to conduct this project to understand the reasons behind such physical inactivity and to investigate the possibility of using social media as an effective strategy when targeting young women regarding issues such as sports and PA in Saudi Arabia.

1.8. Structure of the Thesis

Chapter Two addresses contextual issues relating to the research undertaken in Saudi Arabia. It first begins with an exploration of the meanings attached to PA, sports and space. The Chapter then follows with a discussion of Saudi Arabia, in terms of its geographical, demographic, religious, social, cultural, and structural characteristics. The primary purpose of this chapter is to explore how ideas of Islam, traditions and society's beliefs, and structural issues influence Saudi women's experiences of PA and sports. The Chapter also discusses the opportunities that Vision 2023, one of the greatest and most important national projects to diversify the economy and reduce oil dependency, has brought in the fight for women's rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The conclusion presents a discussion about the Saudi social media environment, honing into its use by Saudi women.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework of this thesis. This Chapter is structured around three main bodies of research; digital activism; digital feminist activism; and social media influencers. This Chapter contains a discussion about the developments in digital feminist activism and examples of how social media platforms have been used in feminist campaigns to advocate for political and social change. This Chapter also reviews the role of feminist hashtags, in particular their unique power in highlighting feminist issues, which paved the way to achieve personal and social change in their sport and PA campaigns. The Chapter also elaborates on the concept of self-representation which was used in this study to understand how sportswomen and social media influencers increase their visibility online and for digital sports activism.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the research background, the questions, and the rationale behind the selection of abductive, grounded research. Moreover, the Chapter

follows with a discussion of the sampling strategy, how access to study participants was gained, and how they were recruited. The Chapter also provides an overview of the overall methodology. The conclusion entails a description of the chosen techniques for data analysis and a discussion of the ethical issues involved.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the findings of the study. Chapter Five uses the results of the focus group and interview analysis to explore how Saudi women understand and experience PA and sports, and also to find out what challenges they face in engaging with them (RQ 1). This Chapter is structured into two main parts. The first part covers women's understandings of PA, sports, and place, within the context of public and private spaces; discusses the kinds of sports activities that these women can perform in public as well as presenting data on the attitudes of Saudi women towards taking up outdoor activities in mixed-gender events. The second part explores the influence of religion, traditions, and societal beliefs on women's decisions; the role of the family; and the effects of practical issues such as sporting facilities and membership fees, and government support on women's attitudes towards PA and sports. Chapter Six discusses the results of the focus groups on how Saudi young women understand digital campaigning focused on women's PA and sports in Saudi Arabia (RQ 2). This Chapter covers their understandings of online campaigns organised by governmental and non-governmental organisations, online sports and fitness personalities, and social media influencers. Chapter Seven contains the results of the interview analysis relating to how and why Saudi women use social media as well as how they understand the role of social media influencers, celebrities, and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes (RQ 3). This Chapter is structured into two main parts. The first part explores Saudi women's everyday social media practices: the most used social media platforms, the average time spent daily on these platforms, as well as the most common reasons for using them. The second part of the chapter discusses, in more specific terms, Saudi women's experiences with social media influencers, celebrities, and sportswomen, particularly around issues related to feminine beauty ideals and dress codes on social media.

Chapter Eight discusses the overall findings from both phases – focus groups and interviews, especially through a theoretical lens. This Chapter also presents the main contributions this study makes to the existing research. Moreover, Chapter Eight considers the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for further research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the contribution that this thesis is making to scholarship on intersectional feminism, particularly in the Saudi Arabian context. It discusses how the findings illuminate the way intersectionality works in shaping experiences and understandings of digital campaigning in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 2. Research Context

2.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses contextual issues relating to research undertaken in Saudi Arabia. The first part of the chapter begins with an exploration of the meanings attached to PA, sports and space. It is then followed by a discussion on Saudi Arabia, in terms of its geographical, demographical, religious, social, cultural, and structural context. The primary purpose of this section is to explore how ideas of Islam, traditions and society's beliefs, and structural issues influence Saudi women's experiences of PA and sports.

After establishing the role that religious, socio—cultural, and structural aspects have played in shaping women's attitudes towards PA and sports, I discuss Vision 2030, one of the greatest and most important national projects to diversify the economy and reduce oil dependency which served as a turning point in the fight for women's rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Vision 2030 is highly relevant to this study, as one of its principal goals is reforming public attitudes towards women, particularly around women's sports (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016; Manzlawiy, 2018). Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion about the Saudi social media environment, honing into its use by Saudi women.

2.2. Conceptualising Physical Activity, Sports and Space

The terms PA, sports and space are somewhat contested terms that can be conceptualised in many ways (Bettis and Adams, 2005; Ponomarev, 1974). For example, in the field of understanding public health, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined PA as "any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure-including activities undertaken while working, playing, carrying out household chores, travelling and engaging in

recreational pursuits" (WHO, 2018, no pagination). Sport has different definitions. Within the sociology of sporting literature, Ponomarev (1974) understood sport "as the basic form of a physical culture characterised by physical exercises leading to all-round development, practised by the masses and marked by high motoric tensions and the resulting effort; it leads to a sports spectacle" (p. 122).

When it comes to the study of space in relation to sports and PA, Stride (2016) referred to the physical, social, and cultural spaces where young women undertake their sports and PA. Physical space is conceived as the architectural layout of buildings, the amount of physical space as well as whether these spaces are public or private (Stride, 2016). Feminist researchers have highlighted the importance of physical space in the practice of ensuring the surveillance, ordering, and disciplining of bodies (e.g., Webb et al, 2004; Bettis and Adams, 2005; Stride, 2016; Azzarito, 2009). These disciplinary practices take place in and through relationships of power, and thus the significance of social and cultural spaces is acknowledged (Stride, 2016; Scraton and Watson, 1998). In his study of PA and the rate of sport participation among girls and boys aged 13-16 living in the UK, Evans (2006) argued that the issues of control and surveillance over pupils' bodies are important, in order to understand why some girls did not enjoy the sport in certain spaces, such as in school as compared to those outside the school e.g., women-only sporting spaces. These women-only sporting spaces provide girls more freedom to move, without worrying about their bodies being judged, labelled, or deemed inadequately 'feminine' in sports in the eyes of boys (Azzarito and Hill, 2013).

Another way to understand space can be linked to the work of Green and Singleton (2006); Massey (1994), in their definition of the "making of space". They critiqued views of space as neutral, appreciating instead the social production of space. They emphasised that our

understanding of space and place are gendered in ways that vary over time and between cultures. "The gendered nature of spaces and places both 'reflects and has effects back on' the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (Green and Singleton, 2006, p. 856). Consequently, spaces can be sites of discrimination and exclusion, domination and belonging (Azzarito and Hill, 2013; Green and Singleton, 2006; Stride, 2016). Uteng (2009), in her discussion of women's restrained mobility in public and private spaces within the Western context, noted that, traditionally, masculinity has come to be codified as mobile in public places, whereas femininity is viewed as static in the home which is considered as a woman's domestic space.

That said, the stance that I take in this study is grounded in personal interpretations i.e., this study elected not to adopt a specific definition of PA, sports and space from the previous definitions above, but to place the overall focus and emphasis on Saudi women's own understandings of PA, sports and space. Therefore, in this study, defining PA, sports and space is a part of my research questions.

2.3. Saudi Arabia Profile - Overview

2.3.1. Geography

Saudi Arabia, officially known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was established in 1932 by King Abdul-Aziz bin Saud. Situated in Southwestern Asia, the country covers a large part of the Arabian Peninsula with a land area of 2,149,790 square kilometres (or 830,039 square miles) (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015; Hamdan, 2005). The Kingdom is bordered by many countries - Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait to the north, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to the east, and Yemen to the south; the Red Sea lies to the west and the Arabian Gulf to the east (Sherifa, 2012). The main cities in the Kingdom are Riyadh, the capital, which is located in the centre Page | 28

of the country, Jeddah - the main port on the Red Sea and Dammam - the main port on the Arabian Gulf (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015).

Saudi Arabia is of religious importance to all Muslims worldwide as the country where Islam originated and also where the two holy Islamic cities, AlmasjidAlharam in Mecca and AlmasjidAlnabawi in Medina, are located (Alrashidi and Phan, 2015). Aside from its geographical and religious importance, Saudi Arabia also has a strong economic significance, being one of the world's top oil exporters.



Figure 1: Saudi Arabia Base Map (Wikimedia Commons, 2022).

2.3.2. Demography

In 2021, the total population of Saudi Arabia was recorded at 34 million, as reported by the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT, 2021). Within this population, males made up 56% and females accounted for 43 %. The higher proportion of males is mostly due to the presence of non-Saudi males of working age (immigrant workers e.g., from Arab, Western and Page | 29

Southeast Asian countries). The gender distribution of the Saudi Arabian national population alone is quite equal, with 50% males and 49% females (GASTAT, 2021).

The Saudi Arabian population is skewed towards the younger age groups, with the number of Saudi citizens below the age of 35 years constituting 68 % of the total Saudi population (GASTAT, 2021). The large percentage of Saudi's young population is seen as one of the main drivers of the very high consumption of social media in the country (Al-Haidari, 2016; Alhamadi, 2017). These groups aged up to 35 are often classified as 'digital natives', since they have grown up with access to the Internet and, therefore, social media is an integral part of their lives and can be seen as second nature to them (Prensky, 2001). Further discussions about the social media landscape in the country will be presented in Section 2.7.

Saudi Arabians, i.e., those with Saudi Arabian nationality, can be broadly divided into three main groups: tribal, non-tribal and of immigrant origins. **Tribal people (Qabila)** claim purity of descent from one of two Arab ancestors—Adnan or Qahtan and have thus *asl* (the honour that came from nobility of origin) (Metz, 1993). They live all over the Kingdom, especially in the centre (Najd), north and south. Tribal people are said to represent the majority of the population, although there is no accurate demographic census or poll which indicates this percentage (Alhuzami and Bailey, 2021). Some of the largest tribes in Saudi Arabia include Otaiba, Harb, Mutair, Shammer, Anizah, Dawasir, and Qahtan. It is worth noting that some of these large tribes are spread across the Arabian Peninsula and even far beyond it. For instance, the large tribes of Shammer and Anizah can be found in Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (Alhuzami and Bailey, 2021). **Non-tribal groups (Khadir)** are formed by people whose ancestors populated towns and villages for many years. They have known family names, but they have no *Qabila* descent. They share the same culture and traditions as those

of tribal groups and in society, they cannot be distinguished without knowing their families' names (Alhuzami and Bailey, 2021). Those of **immigrant origin (Higazi)** are mainly descendants of foreign Muslims who came for the pilgrimage and stayed in Mecca, Medina and Jeddah in the western region, under Ottoman rule until 1925. These people came from countries all over the world: Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Africa, China and from the Soviet Union (Metz, 1993).

2.4. Physical Activity, Sports and Saudi Arabia

In the past few decades, changes in the lifestyle of the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been evident. It can be observed that PA patterns coupled with people's eating habits have likewise changed, possibly resulting in harmful effects on the health of society. The continuous rise in the number of non-communicable diseases (NCD), along with the implications associated with them, is said to be due to these negative lifestyle changes (Al-Nozha et al, 2007). Unfortunately, there is a lack of monitoring or studies that track the causal links between physical activities and their health implications. However, there have been studies noting a decrease in the engagement with PA by people living in the current generation, compared to those of the past (Al-Hazzaa, 2004). In fact, findings from a recent national survey among Saudi adults aged 15 to 24 showed that 42% of men and 76% of women did not meet the WHO recommended guidelines of 150 minutes per week of moderate activity and 75 minutes per week of vigorous activity (Moradi-Lakeh et al, 2016). As such, it is worth exploring which factors shape women's experiences of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia.

2.4.1. Public Health Campaigns in Saudi Arabia

At present, the Ministry of Health (MOH) is the government agency responsible for the public health care system in Saudi Arabia. The provision of free medical support to all citizens and expatriates is its main function (Almalki et al, 2011). The MOH is accountable for formulating, planning, and managing health policies, supervising health programmes, and monitoring health services in both the public and private sectors. It is likewise responsible for providing recommendations to other government agencies and the private sector in achieving the overall health objectives of the whole country (Almalki et al, 2011).

Over the years, MOH has assumed a leading role in the country's initiatives, including programmes aimed at improving health by promoting physical activities. It has introduced projects and several advocacies in order to educate and train healthcare professionals to continuously promote the engagement of citizens in physical activities and exercises. Moreover, for the past several years, as part of the National Strategy on Diet and Physical Activity, the MOH has conducted and facilitated various workshops, training courses, and lectures in most regions of Saudi Arabia with the primary objective of introducing and promoting a balanced diet and PA (Al-Hazzaa and AlMarzooqi, 2018). Training manuals and posters, and electronic educational platforms have been produced to aid projects relative to media awareness campaigns. *Shatik Beddonia*, an example of a campaign, which refers to "Your Health should be worth everything to you," was implemented by the Noncommunicable Diseases branch of the MOH. It targeted weight loss through a healthy diet and PA. The 2011 campaign is supported by a range of online resources^{1,2} (Al-Hazzaa and

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¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaMNeSXGU40

² https://twitter.com/DietCampaign

AlMarzooqi, 2018). Another Ministry of Health online campaign called Saudi Arabia is Walking; this is a Twitter-based mass participation campaign that started in 2017 and continued into 2018. The campaign began in Al-Jouf (Northern region of Saudi Arabia) and expanded to cover other major cities in the country (Al-Hazzaa and AlMarzooqi, 2018). The campaign aimed to increase the number of people who walk regularly for maintaining good health and preventing chronic diseases. In its second year, the campaign received support from the Saudi Sports For All Federation. In 2018, there were over 50 walking groups participating in this campaign, the number appeared to be growing (Al-Hazzaa and AlMarzoogi, 2018). A more recent campaign was launched in 2020 during the global health crisis pertaining to COVID-19, called *Baytak Nadeek*³, which refers to "Your home, your gym". This campaign, which is closely supported by the Saudi Sports For All Federation (SFA), aims to encourage Saudis to stay active and keep fit during this period of homebound safety, as well as to connect with people across the country in order to unify and motivate everyone (SFA, 2020). In addition, a number of female and male trainers and coaches are also promoting this initiative, offering a range of online sports programmes that are meant to help people practise sports at home (SFA, 2020).

2.5. Religious Attitudes, Saudi Socio-Cultural and Structural Aspects, and Women

The previous section sheds light on the country of Saudi Arabia, especially in relation to its geography, demography, and explores the status of PA in the country. This section will discuss the role that Islam has in shaping women's attitudes towards PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. It also explores how ideas of traditions and society's beliefs, and structural issues influence Saudi women's experiences of PA and sports. It is worth noting that this section is mainly

Sports for All - YouTube | أبطال بيتك ناديك 3

drawing on the experiences of Muslim women from Western contexts, e.g., from Europe and North America, but it is interesting to see how these studies could be relevant to my study of Saudi young women.

2.5.1. Islam, Women, Physical Activity and Sports

Lack of press freedom in Arab countries, where governments can exert substantial control over a large proportion of television channels and newspapers, can impact negatively on women's ability to have their voices heard (Odine, 2013). Therefore, women's issues (i.e., education, positions of authority etc.,) are often marginalised and ignored (Odine, 2013). Dashti et al (2015) noted that the voices of female Arabs are often considered less audible than those of men, even if they constitute a large proportion in many Arab societies. In Saudi Arabia, women of the present generation face challenges in achieving their goals and ambitions in life (AlMarzooqi, 2018). It may seem that these challenges are because of religion, when, in fact, Islam does not limit nor hinder opportunities for women, encouraging them to maximise their skills, abilities, and potentials in order to pursue their dreams and make significant contributions to the society (AlMarzooqi, 2018). Nasir (2009) shared that Islam is a religion of knowledge. Nasir (2009) quoted Prophet Muhammad who said that knowledge should be sought, and the teaching of Islam that all knowledge is knowledge of God, and as such, every Muslim has a divine duty to seek it.

In addition to granting their right to knowledge, Islam also has given women the right to work in all sectors, whether in commerce, industry or in agriculture, as long as they do not bring harm to themselves and their families (Baki, 2004). According to Hamdan (2005), Islamic history has many examples of successful female commercial entrepreneurs; Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, is often cited as the first prominent businesswoman in Islam.

Pharaon (2004) illustrated a further prominent indication of equality of the sexes mentioned in Islam - women have been given the absolute right to inherit property in their own right; neither their fathers nor husbands are allowed to tamper with their property.

Regarding Islam, PA and sports, Jawad et al (2010) stated that neither the Quran nor Hadith explicitly prohibits men and women from practising sport, as long as it does not take precedence over faith. Therefore, the 'Accept and Respect' declaration asserts that 'Islam is an enabling religion that does not preclude women's participation in physical activities" (Jawad et al, 2010, p. 32). The Hadith texts include some examples from the Prophet Muhammad's life that can be used to promote equality of opportunity and the participation of both girls and boys. For instance, Steir et al (1985, p. 294) noted that the Prophet Muhammad made no difference between the sexes and encouraged physical activities for both girls and boys; as he commented: "Haqq al-walad ala al-waled an youallimahou alkitabat wa al-sibahat wa al-rami, "the right of the child is one of obligating his father to teach him writing, swimming, and archery". The Prophet Muhammad used the Arabic word "walad' that means child, boy, or girl, while "sabi" means boy and "bint" means girl (Steir et al, 1985, p. 294). Additionally, there is a reference to the Prophet Muhammad racing with his wife Aisha; as she said: "I raced with the Prophet and beat him in the race. Later, when I had put on some weight, we raced again and he won. Then he said: 'this cancels that' [draw], referring to the previous occasion" (Walseth and Fasting, 2003, p. 53). There is also evidence that some women fought alongside the men, requiring that they be physically fit warriors. Recognising the efforts of a particular woman, Nusaiba bint Kab al-Mazinia, the Prophet Muhammad said, 'Wherever I looked, I saw her fighting before me' (Jawad et al, 2010, p. 32).

Based on the above discussion, traditionally, Islam shows a positive attitude toward women's participation in sports. However, despite this, the levels of PA and sports among Muslim girls and women remain low (Sharara et al, 2018). The explanation might be found in the analysis of certain practices, both inside and outside of Islam, practices such as the significance of single-sex sport facilities provision and the consideration for modesty and/or the wearing of the religious hijab that have been highlighted by many scholars (e.g., Knez et al, 2012; Walseth, 2015; Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Ahmad, 2011). Ahmad (2011), for example, pointed out that the discussion of women's participation in sports today is built around ideas of sex segregation and the hijab, despite the fact that there is no explicit mention of sex segregation within Islamic texts, and only minimal reference to the hijab. Interestingly, the same source material has been used to promote both the hijab and gender segregation, as the concept of segregation is an extension of the requirements of the hijab. Discussions on gender segregation and hijab show how these practices are rooted in cultural influences, with little references to Islamic texts (Ahmad, 2011).

However, there is great diversity in how Muslims interpret these texts and this, in return, has led to different experiences amongst Muslims across the world, as Walseth and Fasting (2003), have shown. Muslim women supporting the fundamentalistic interpretations of Islam follow Islamic teachings which include the importance of covering their body from the male gaze. They are more likely to demonstrate this through the use of the veil (the hijabheadscarf-covering only the hair, the krimar-covering the hair and the breasts, and the niqabhace veil, often used with the krimar). Research shows that these women consider their participation in sports as appropriate if it is taken in places that are exclusively for them, where they will be entirely away from the male view (Walseth and Fasting, 2003). On the

other hand, Muslim women taking a secular position demand the segregation of state and religion. They advocate freedom of choice in religion and lifestyle and demand equal access to all aspects of society, including sports (Pfister, 2010). These women, as Walseth and Fasting (2003) showed, did not mind playing sports and participating in competitions because they interpret Islam in a way that neither the veil nor sex segregation raise any problems for their participation. The same women, however, pointed to other factors, e.g., patriarchy, which appears to be their primary barrier when it comes to sports participation. Hence, it is appropriate, as will be discussed in the following section, to explore some of these factors.

2.5.2. Saudi Socio-Cultural Aspects

In Saudi Arabia, as elsewhere in Muslim Arab societies, social life is often structured around gender distinctions, with men and women having divergent spheres in terms of ideology and behaviour (Harkness, 2012). Hamdan (2005) stated that Muslim women are often regarded as extensions of their male guardians, i.e., a woman should obey her father or the nearest male kin in the absence/death of the father; after marriage, it would be her husband; in the case of the husband's death, her son. In these cultures, while Muslim men's roles are situated outside the home-i.e., taking on jobs to financially support the family-most Muslim women's main roles are those that relate to the home-i.e., fulfilling the traditional roles of mother and housewife; having the role of keeping together the structure of the family, and therefore of the society (Arar and Rigbi, 2009; Pharaon, 2004; De Knop et al, 1996). In terms of traits, women are portrayed as submissive, dependent, weak, and emotional, whereas men are seen to be independent, aggressive, dominant and active (Kharroub and Weaver, 2014).

In Islamic society, a woman's conduct also reflects her honour and that of the family. This honour of the family is being protected through the sexual purity of all women—to keep their

virginity until marriage (De Knop et al, 1996). With this, women are expected to limit their contact and interaction with the opposite sex as much as possible. Even married Saudi women are expected to avoid contact with the opposite sex to uphold sexual morality (De Knop et al, 1996). As part of the culture, when a woman leaves the house, she is required to cover her body by wearing the abaya (a black long garment that covers the entire body), to cover her body, with a hijab (a head cover that hides hair) (Al Lily, 2011). When they are outside the home, women are also expected to behave in a modest and self-deprecating manner (De Knop et al, 1996).

Such cultural codes tend to oppose women's aspirations concerning individual and career development in general. This opposition can be more grounded when it comes to PA (Arar and Rigbi, 2009). In their study of Arab females living in Qatar, perceptions of common facilitators and inhibitors to their sports participation, Donnelly et al (2018) found that the lack of support from family was often presented as a barrier to sports participation. Donnelly et al (2018) reported that some younger women suggested that their parents did not support their sports participation due to the belief that studies and success in education were deemed more important than being physically active or maintaining good health. As one of the informants said, "[My parents] would say, 'don't go, it's not necessary, don't waste your time" (Donnelly et al, 2018, p. 11). Other female participants mentioned that some families did not allow their women to practise outdoor activities i.e., going for a walk or going to the gym, unless they are chaperoned by a family member e.g., their fathers, brothers, or husbands and this, in return, has reduced their opportunities for physical activities and has limited them to solely indoor activities (Donnelly et al, 2018; Amin et al, 2011; Benjamin and Donnelly, 2013).

Other opposition to female sports participation concerns the idea that women's participation in sport is perceived as 'masculine' and therefore inappropriate (Arar and Rigbi, 2009). Those who participated in activities that are deemed to go against the nature of their femininity will risk losing their sacred virginity (De Knop et al, 1996; Sfeir, 1985). Such an idea was strongly endorsed by some Saudi Arabian religious leaders, for example, a representative of the Supreme Council of Religious Scholars, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Maneea, put forward the idea when he stressed that "the excessive movement and jumping required in football and basketball might cause girls to lose their virginity" (Shaheed, 2015, p. 256). Furthermore, the hijab, the loose garments that women in Saudi Arabia are required to wear when they leave the house, could constrain them from performing certain types of physical and outdoor activities, and as Aljaaly (2016) reported, wearing them could limit their options in engaging in sports and recreation. For example, if women want to go running outside, they need to wear certain types of clothes that will allow them to move much more easily but traditional types of dress, such as the Abaya, sometimes hinder movement and cause discomfort during exercise.

2.5.3. Structural Constrictions

Alongside social and cultural norms, other aspects that limit women's participation in physical activities and sports are the lack of facilities and the absence of PE (Pfister, 2010; Carroll, 2013). The hot climate is also another constricting factor (Sharara et al, 2018).

Gender segregation has been a prominent part of the culture in Saudi Arabia, wherein women are not allowed to come in close contact with unrelated men in public. This is still being observed up to this day, where most educational institutions, workplaces and banks have separate entrances for men and women (Guta and Karola, 2015). It is important to note that

recently, the Saudi Arabian government has relaxed gender segregation rules with many restaurants, cafes and other meeting places now no longer being required to have separate areas segregated by gender (BBC, 2019). However, Saudi higher education institutions are still strictly segregated by sex, so academics seldom interact with a scholarly peer of the opposite gender. Moreover, female campuses are fenced by high walls to ensure their privacy and separation (Al Lily, 2011).

This continues to limit women's access to sports facilities and equipment, thus excluding them from engaging in physical activities and sports competitions (Pfister, 2010). In addition, considering the hot climate (30 - 50 degree Celsius) of the Gulf countries, outdoor physical activities such as walking, cycling, and jogging may only be done in short seasons, and performing them continuously requires special indoor facilities (Sharara et al, 2018) that are currently lacking in the country. Carroll (2013) noted that even in public schools in the country, women are not exposed to sports education, which is beneficial to their health and well-being. However, this problem is now being addressed by the Saudi government, which has announced its plan to invest in sports facilities and infrastructures within schools to introduce PE to girls (Carroll, 2013). The Ministry of Education has mentioned that this will be introduced gradually and will be facilitated in accordance with the Islamic Shariah law regulations and may depend on the capacities of the schools (Human Rights Watch, 2017). However, some Saudi women, as Carroll's (2013) study has shown, opposed this and claimed that it is bound to fail given the shortage of trained and certified female instructors and educators in the country to deliver female sports programmes. This was also evident in a recent study by Al-shahrani (2020) who found that Saudi women placed "no experienced female trainers" as an important obstacle to their participation in sports. Al-shahrani (2020) explained that the shortage of qualified female trainers reduces the access of Saudi women to adequate training when practising sports, and this is a big obstacle in their sport practice.

Despite these barriers, some scholars have recognised Muslim women's agency in drawing on alternative discourses in constructing their identities and navigating power relations (e.g., Stride, 2016; Jiwani and Rails, 2010; Palmer, 2009; Thorpe et al, 2020; Walseth, 2006). For instance, research by Jiwani and Rails (2010) showed how young Muslim Canadian women exert their agency and find ways to strategically meet their different kinds of needs and operate within a complex web of conflicting discourses. Drawing attention to discourses on health, obesity, and femininity, they show a desire to be physically active to achieve the ideal body shape, maintain a balanced lifestyle, and stay healthy (Jiwani and Rails, 2010). Other women demonstrated their agency in navigating the influence of hijab discourses through their resourcefulness and creativity in creating culturally appropriate places such as their homes and female-only environments where they enjoy PA and with no need to worry about patriarchal reprisal when they remove their clothing (Palmer, 2009; Thorpe et al, 2020). The young Muslim women with immigrant backgrounds living in Norway, as Walseth (2006) has shown, navigated their physicality by putting greater weight on their religious identity rather than their ethnic identity. Due to the positive attitudes toward PA and sports in Islam, it was important for these young women to participate in sports. By choosing to identify with Islam, these young women were able to separate tradition and religion. In return, it has given them more individual space for action, despite limitations within the accepted Islamic limits. However, this space, as has been argued earlier, is not as narrow as non-Muslims might believe, it is open to more interpretations and the young women in Walseth's (2006) study opted for a modern interpretation of Islam where they claimed equality between men and women; the issue of exercising and being occupied with health matters are seen as an important part of their identities as mothers, athletes and working women (Walseth, 2006).

2.6. Saudi Vision 2030: Empowering Women

As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia becomes more westernised and seeks international recognition, the treatment of women has risen to the top of the list of challenges that the country needs to address (Carroll, 2013). As such, in the past few years, several attempts have been made to reform women's status and roles within society (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). In 2012, King Abdullah issued a royal decree that allowed Saudi women to enter the Consultative Council (*Majlis Alshura*) and register as candidates for municipal elections for the first time in history (Rajkhan, 2014). According to BBC (2015), there were 978 Saudi women registered as candidates for the 2015⁴ municipal elections alongside 5,938 men. In addition, around 130,000 women registered to vote but this figure still falls far behind the male registration rate, which is at 1.35 million (BBC, 2015).

In April 2016, Saudi Arabia launched an ambitious project known as 'Vision 2030', which marked a significant moment in the fight for women's rights in the country (Sabir and Zenaidi, 2019). The Vision is considered one of the most important national projects and is led by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. The project sets clear goals and milestones that must be achieved by the government (Althiabi, 2017). The vision of 2030 is to transform Saudi Arabia into a strong country with a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious

⁴It is important to note that the first session of municipal councils in Saudi Arabia was in 2005, followed by the second session in 2011 and the third session in 2015, where women were allowed for the first time to register as candidates. It has not been cleared yet whether there will be a fourth session or whether the third session ended, which would be the last session in the municipal councils in the Kingdom.

nation (Afzal and Omar, 2021). In his foreword to the project, Prince Mohammad bin Salman stressed the following:

Our ambition is for the long term. It goes beyond replenishing sources of income that have weakened or preserving what we have already achieved. We are determined to build a thriving country in which all citizens can fulfil their dreams, hopes, and ambitions. Therefore, we will not rest until our nation is a leader in providing opportunities for all through education and training, and high-quality services such as employment initiatives, health, housing, and entertainment (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016, p. 7).

The Saudi Vision 2030 (2016) has several goals, one of the principal ones being the reforming of the Saudi public's attitudes toward women (Manzlawiy, 2018). This includes increasing female mobility in public spaces. Until recently, Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world that imposed a legal ban on women driving so families had to hire male drivers to drive their female relatives (Saleh and Malibari, 2021). However, in September 2017, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enacted a decree granting women the right to drive vehicles, a move that took place in June 2018 (Saleh and Malibari, 2021). Furthermore, Vision 2030 also focuses on reducing unemployment among Saudi women and increasing women's contribution to the workplace (Manzlawiy, 2018). It supports the role of women within society by allowing them to take up jobs that used to be for men only and by taking into consideration what is suitable for them within the local culture (Taghreed, 2018). Now it is common in Saudi Arabia to find women working as cashiers in shopping malls, supermarkets, jewellery shops, electronics stores, and cafes (Hassan, 2018). In 2019, there were around 600,000 Saudi women working for the private sector, compared to 2011 where the number of Saudi women working for the

private sector was only around 90,000 according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (Sabir and Zenaidi, 2019).

Vision 2030 (2016) has also paid considerable attention to women's sports (Al Ohali, 2020). Until 2017, female gyms were not officially licensed, and those in operation were licensed as spas or cafes, or others without a licence at all (Lysa, 2020). The few gyms that were available were expensive and they catered to a particular segment of the population i.e., people with financial resources to pay for these sport facilities. The lack of government support is noticeable all the way, from professional sports to grassroots PA and leisure (Lysa, 2020). In 2012, Saudi Arabia became the last country, along with Qatar and Brunei, to send female athletes to the London Summer Olympics as part of its official delegation (Khalaf, 2016; Lysa, 2020). However, back in Saudi Arabia, the situation was different, support for female athletes was still lacking. This was still the case four years later, when Saudi Arabia sent a new delegation of female athletes to participate in the Rio Olympic Games in 2016 (Khalaf, 2016; Lysa, 2020).

In the last few years, several forward-moving steps have been taken for Saudi women in the realm of sports, starting from the appointment of Reem bint Bandar Al Saud as head of women's sports in August 2016. Since then, the government of Saudi Arabia has gradually started licensing gyms, introducing PE courses in public schools for girls, and licensing female sports events (Lysa, 2020; Toumi, 2017). In 2017, Saudi Arabia hosted its first-ever women's basketball tournament in King Abdullah Sports City, Jeddah. It was attended exclusively by women (Toumi, 2017). The event was welcomed by many Saudi women as Rasha Al Harbi, the founder and leader of Bliss Run-a non-profit team promoting women's sports programmes, said, "for the first time, Saudi women are allowed to exercise their natural right

to the stadium to watch a women's game. It was great. The organisers were keen on the privacy of the spectators and on having well-marked entry and exit ways to ensure a smooth flow of movement" (Toumi, 2017, no pagination). The success of this event led to the Gulf's first women's football tournament in Al-Khobar Sports City. Clubs from within the Kingdom as well as from different Gulf countries participated in the tournament, under the patronage of Prince Saud bin Naif, Emir of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (Al-Saeed, 2019).

Following these events, the first-ever women's run took place. Hosted in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia Al Ahsa, over 1,500 women nationwide came to take part. This event took place just weeks after the Saudi government announced that women will be permitted to take part in the Riyadh-the capital of Saudi Arabia-International Marathon in 2019 (Khalife, 2019). In that same year, 47 women came together to join in the Kingdom's first-ever, women-only 10-kilometre cycling race held in Jeddah under the governance of the Saudi General Authority for Sports in the King Abdullah City for Sports. This coincided with the celebration of International Health Day. The event was organised by a group of women called "Be Active" who meet to train and cycle daily (Nabbout, 2018).

However, factors such as strict gender norms and laws, the harsh climate, and the absence of suitable sports facilities and spaces still place barriers on PA for women (Lysa, 2020; Sfeir et al, 1985; AlMarzooqi, 2018). Khalaf (2016) stated that even though Saudi Arabia sent female athletes to the London 2012 and also to the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics which are breakthroughs in itself, it is still not fully prepared to encourage women's involvement in sports, as no significant policies or laws have been implemented. It can be observed that the female athletes who participated in the 2012 and 2016 Summer Olympics have in fact

already migrated abroad. They are said to have already adapted to a different culture and perspective and were open to joining such sporting activities. In addition, these women had access to various sports facilities abroad (Khalaf, 2016).

This move to engaging women in sports is still an area with room for considerable development. It will continue to be an important and no doubt controversial issue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but there is likely to be more pressure for resources for women to be involved in sports and physical activities, as grassroots organisations organise themselves on social media to lobby for women's health and call for greater reforms for women in this field, which serves as one of the main cases in this study.

2.7. The Social Media Environment in Saudi Arabia

Before proceeding to a discussion about how to define the terms "social network sites" or "social media platforms", statistics related to social media use in Saudi Arabia and the use of social media by Saudi women in particular, it is important to begin with the context of traditional and digital media governances in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy that restricts almost all political and civil rights. The government has control of traditional media and heavily influences the digital landscape (Freedom House, 2021, 2022). In 2011, a royal decree installed the press law, criminalising, among other things, any criticism of the government officials, the country's grand mufti, or the Council of Senior Religious Leaders. Violations are punishable by fines and the closure of media outlets (Freedom House, 2021). Authorities regularly monitor social media pages and websites, blocking any content that disseminates violent extremist ideologies, as well as those related to gambling, pornography, drugs, and content that distributes copyrighted materials. If users attempt to access a banned site, they are redirected to a page showing the message

'Access to the requested URL is not allowed'; a green background is displayed on blocked sites by the Communication Information and Technology Commission (CITC) (Freedom House, 2022). According to the government, this practice is being implemented to protect national security and maintain social order (Freedom House, 2022).

2.7.1. Social Media

The terms "social networks" and "social media" technologies can be confusing. The former, which includes, among others, Myspace, Facebook, and LinkedIn, is defined by Ellison and Boyd (2013) as the following:

A networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (p. 158).

Social media, on the other hand, is viewed as a medium whereby participants with ordinary consumer tools (that do not need professional equipment or specialist knowledge) can create user-generated content (UGC) that reflect their individual interests and that of their readers (Klinger and Svensson, 2015). Amongst well-known UGC sites are YouTube, Wikipedia, and Flickr (Van Dijck, 2013). Additionally, Murthy (2012); Howard and Parks (2012), in their attempt to define social media, have focused more on the social part, by emphasising that social media is inherently social and this is what makes social media different from 'traditional' media. Social interaction, the sharing of digital media and collaboration are all made possible through social media (Murthy, 2012). Moreover, an important principle of

social media logic is the ability to create 'connectedness'. According to Van Dijck and Poell, (2013), mass media institutions have always been tailored to specific national or regional audiences with news, information, and entertainment, while selling their audience information about geographically or demographically defined communities. Social media, however, makes it easier for like-minded people to connect from their place of origin and over long distances and this happens because social media facilitates geographically spread niche networks grounded on interests and needs rather than location (Klinger and Svensson, 2015).

Therefore, I have noted that there are some key differences between social network sites and social media platforms. Social network sites are considered a subcategory of social media and are specifically geared towards building relationships through community. Social media is a broader term that involves the broadcasting of information to a large audience. Second, the term social network sites is often associated with Facebook, Myspace and hi5, while social media is associated with platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and Snapchat (McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2017). Nevertheless, the terms "social network" and "social media" sites were used interchangeably by the research participants during the focus groups and interviews to refer to sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram.

2.7.2. Social Media Usage in Saudi Arabia

Within the last few years, social media usage has continuously gained popularity worldwide and in Saudi Arabia in particular. In 2018, the country ranked 33rd globally in terms of the Internet and social media availability (Alkarni, 2018). The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) Report (2019) revealed that the number of Internet users in the Kingdom reached over 30 million in 2019, which represented about 96% of the total Saudi

population (MCIT, 2019). Additionally, it has been reported that Saudi Arabia is the country with the greatest number of social media users in the Middle East. According to Salem (2017), out of the recorded 10.8 million active Twitter Arab users, Saudi Arabian users constituted more than 2 million, representing 29% of the total active users in the region. Saudi Arabia is also ranked second, following Egypt in the number of active Facebook users, out of the recorded 156 million active Facebook Arab users, above 5 million, 13% of total active users are from Saudi Arabia (Salem, 2017). Furthermore, Saudi Arabian youth has also been recognised as having the largest number of users on YouTube in comparison to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions, and watching videos is one of their most popular online activities (Radcliffe and Lam, 2017).

Among social media applications that have become popular in Saudi Arabia is Twitter, where in 2018, there were more than 17.29 million Saudis, accounting for 52% of the country's population, and of this, 62% were young users (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). Snapchat has also become increasingly popular in Saudi Arabia, which has been recorded to have more than 14 million users-43% of the country's population. Most of these users are identified to be female, which is about 51% according to a report published by 'We are Social and Hootsuite' (2019).

Several factors may help to explain the popularity of social media in Saudi Arabia. First is the high rate of smartphone penetration among the younger population (Al-Haidari, 2016). Saudi Arabia currently has the third-highest use of smartphones in the world, with 80% of young people owning a smartphone (Alhamadi, 2017). Additionally, as mentioned earlier, Saudi youth makes up 68% of the country's total population, with almost half of the population

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⁵ <u>Digital 2019: Saudi Arabia — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights</u>

being under 35 years of age (GASTAT, 2021). Moreover, those under the age of 15 constitute one-third of the total Saudi Arabian population (GASTAT, 2021). Hence, due to a large percentage of the Saudi population being young with access to mobile and computer devices, it comes as no surprise that social media are popular among Saudi citizens in general but particularly among the younger ones.

2.7.3. Saudi Women's Uses of Social Media

So far, there has been little academic research exploring the use of social media by women in Saudi Arabia. However, part of the purpose of this research is to address this by exploring the way Saudi women use social media and also the reasons that drive such use.

New technologies and digital media have brought new realities to the lives of Saudi Arabian people in general, and Saudi women in particular, especially considering Saudi Arabian culture. Al-Saggaf (2004) studied how online communities in Saudi Arabia are affecting offline communities and noted that because of the hierarchical structure of Saudi Arabian society, older people dominate the offline community, which in turn, limits the chances of marginalised individuals i.e., young people and women, to express their opinions and be part of the decision—making process. For this reason, they tend to grow up with less confidence in themselves. In his study, Al-Saggaf (2004) observed that through online communities, participants become more confident in the way they think, how they are able to express themselves and challenge existing views and beliefs freely and openly in public (Al-Saggaf, 2004). As one of the women participants said in Al-Saggaf's study: "My confidence in myself has been increasing. The mingling with people and our interactions gave me confidence in myself and the feeling that I can give more" (Al-Saggaf, 2004, p. 10). Al-Salem (2005) also noted that Saudi women have participated, for the first time in history, in open online forums

wherein they discuss issues around women's rights and ask society to support them in their fight. For example, as discussed earlier, one of the important aspects of this is to be given the right to vote and to stand for municipal elections, in the same way as their male counterparts. Another critical issue is their engagement with PA and sports (Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa, 2020; Baker, 2016). Further discussions about such use of social media will be presented in Chapter Three (Section 3.4.2.). Moreover, it can be observed that, through social media, women can access information that might otherwise be restricted by cultural, political, and local barriers (Guta and Karola, 2015).

Additionally, gender segregation has affected how women behave in society (Al Lily, 2011; Madini and Nooy, 2014). For instance, by culture and custom, when a Saudi woman needs to communicate with a man, she is required to keep this communication at a low level, to speak with him without looking at him, and to keep her voice lower, and this has contributed to Saudi women being known for their shyness (Al Lily, 2011). Guta and Karola (2015) explained the need for gender segregation is most often driven by citing Islamic teachings; however, some scholars have challenged such an idea. It is important to note that some Saudi Arabian religious scholars, among others Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mutlaq, stress the importance of gender segregation being imposed on social media as well (Guta and Karola, 2015). In May 2014, the Saudi cleric issued an edict prohibiting chatting between the two genders and describing such activities as similar to physical mingling between unrelated men and women (Wheeler, 2017). In the words of Al-Mutlaq, "The devil would be present when women talk to men on social network sites" (Wheeler, 2017, p. 16). Al-Mutlaq saw the phenomenon of women talking to men via social media as something that he would consider illegitimate, except in the case of necessity, where it may be for the benefits of work or consultation while maintaining the legal

guidelines so that there should not be words in their conversations that are not religiously or socially appropriate (Wheeler, 2017).

However, in contrast, according to Madini and Nooy (2014); Pharaon (2004), the presence of social media has provided women with greater opportunities to circumvent gender restrictions placed upon them by conservative societies. Madini (2012) noted that new media can bridge the public/private world of Saudi society and cross-gender communications are made possible without the violation of behaviour rules. That is to say that both genders have begun to use chat rooms, forums, and social networking sites to communicate with each other while still maintaining physical segregation (Madini, 2012; Madini and Nooy, 2014). This continuous dialogue between the two genders, according to Al-Saggaf (2004), will allow them to become used to the presence of each other and so become less inhibited by each other.

That said, although the use of social media in Saudi Arabia has brought many advantages, it is not free from issues and challenges. The Saudi Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (known in the west for the Religious Policy) found itself increasingly confronted by an emerging problem involving the use of social media by men; social media is being used to obtain private images and information, for the purpose of blackmailing women for sexual favours or money, alongside other demands, in return for destroying their private information (Al-Saggaf, 2016). According to the Saudi Committee for the Promotion and the Prevention of Vice, in 2018, 74% of the blackmail cases involved sexual demands while 14% represented cash demands (Saudi Gazette, 2018). Al-Saggaf (2016) stated that when the women refuse to comply with the demands, the blackmailer threatens to distribute their images to other people, including their family members. A study by Almakrami (2015) found that Saudi Arabian participants, mostly females, ranked blackmail as one of the primary

threats associated with the violation of their privacy on social media, particularly on Facebook.

Research on issues of abuse and harassment on social media undertaken with non-Muslim participants e.g., from Germany, Australia, etc., discussed how women manage this problem (e.g., Mendes, 2015; Mendes et al, 2018, 2019; Carstensen, 2013). Mendes (2015), for example, pointed out that when it comes to the issue of trolling, the debate primarily revolves around the idea, "When-and where-is it legitimate to draw the line?" (Mendes, 2015, p. 177). Within this, "it became clear that there were very real differences and perspectives, strategies and policies when it came to trolls" (Mendes, 2015, p. 177). In their study of the common strategies used by women in the face of trolling, Mendes et al (2019) found that the main issue among many female participants is related to being "strategic" in their management techniques. This includes deciding whether it is more useful to ignore the attackers, block them, or whether it is better to take the matter further and report the abuse to the authorities and seek to punish them. Mendes et al (2019) concluded that despite the fact that trolling is often viewed as harmful, many women were pragmatic about it, consciously choosing to disregard their messages or block the attackers, and, instead, concentrating their energy elsewhere. As one of the female participants said:

But, you know, it takes a lot of energy, it really does, figuring out when you're going to engage [with trolls] or what you have time for, or what you feel like is doing activism in everyday life, or if it's just like, yeah, I don't have space for this right now (Mendes et al, 2019, p. 94).

In the context of Saudi Arabia, the female participants in Almakrami 's (2015) study used a range of management strategies to protect their privacy on social media, particularly on

Facebook and this includes, thinking before posting; only posting what is considered appropriate and socially acceptable content; using ambiguous messages that only make sense to certain people; using aliases on their profiles and engaging only on Facebook groups for sharing private information (p. 229). However, Madini and Nooy (2013) found that almost all women in Saudi forums revealed their gender, whether through the choice of their usernames or the content of their messages. Revealing personal information on social media such as marital status, address, age, and educational levels can be sufficient to cause damage to the reputation of the woman's family-an essential attribute in Saudi Arabian society and can be used for blackmail (Al-Saggaf and Islam, 2015; Al-Saggaf, 2016).

2.8. Concluding Discussion

This chapter reviews three main bodies of research: work focusing on the meanings attached to PA, sports and space; the research context regarding religious, socio-cultural, and structural aspects; and the Saudi social media environment, in terms of statistics related to social media use in Saudi Arabia and the use of social media by Saudi women in particular.

The terms PA, sports and space tend to be somewhat contested and can be conceptualised in many ways, depending on disciplinary areas and research interests (Bettis and Adams, 2005; Ponomarev, 1974; Stride, 2016). For instance, sports can be seen as activities that are dominated by a compulsory element but that are not necessary for the survival of the individual or race. Space, on the other hand, is viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon that can be gendered. In this regard, public spaces have been coded as mobile and linked to men, whereas in private space, the home is coded as static and associated with women. That said, part of the purpose of this research is to address exactly how Saudi women understand the terms of PA, sports and space.

Islam plays a significant role in empowering women; it has secured them the right to knowledge and to work, as well as their inheritance rights. Islam also is supportive when it comes to participation in sports and PA (Nasir, 2009; Pharaon, 2004; Jawad et al, 2010) However, for some women, there can be issues related to the sports environment and the Islamic codes of conduct requiring modesty in dress. However, there is great diversity in the way that Muslims interpret these religious requirements and this, in turn, has led to different experiences of PA and sports amongst Muslims across the world (Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Pfister, 2010).

Social and cultural, as well as structural factors, have enormous power and influence on Arab Muslim women's involvement in sports and PA (Donnelly et al, 2018; Amin et al, 2011; De Knop et al, 1996). Some factors, among others the lack of family support, society's ideals of femininity, a lack of facilities, and the absence of PE are all possible sources of pressure for women when it comes to their participation in sports. Yet, despite these factors, some scholars have recognised the agency of women in finding ways to navigate the influence of these factors (Stride, 2016; Jiwani and Rails, 2010; Palmer, 2009).

The growth of social media sites in Saudi Arabia has been phenomenal. Sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and many others have given a voice to those who were previously marginalised and silenced, notably women and young people (Al-Saggaf, 2004; Al Salem, 2005; Madini and Nooy, 2014). However, the presence of social media is not free from issues and challenges. For example, the issue of blackmail has become a common phenomenon in Saudi Arabia (Al-Saggaf, 2016; Almakrami, 2015).

Social media sites have become a means of campaigning on different issues, and we can observe female activists embracing these platforms as a powerful space for activism and

participation. In Saudi Arabia, many feminists have turned to social media as a powerful space to raise their voices and share their opinions and struggles, as well as use it as a place to draw attention to social issues that they regard as significant. A crucial aspect of this is their engagement in relation to PA and sports.

The following chapter will review existing literature relevant to the present study, including previous work on digital campaigning around sports and PA in the Saudi Arabian context.

Chapter 3. The Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms have gained significant importance in the realm of campaigning, offering citizens novel avenues to connect, cooperate, and engage in matters of public significance (Graham et al, 2016). Feminist activists have also recognised and embraced these platforms as a potent sphere for their activism (Clark, 2015). Hashtags have emerged as powerful strategic tools employed by feminists to enhance consciousness, share information, organise events, foster empowerment, mobilise supporters, and advocate for personal and societal transformation (Clark, 2015; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Carstensen, 2013).

In Saudi Arabia, a significant number of feminists have embraced hashtags as a potent platform to amplify their voices, express their perspectives and challenges, and bring focus to critical feminist matters they deemed important, including #Women2Drive-to demand the right to drive, #EndMaleGuardianship-to end the male guardianship system and most notably #RunningAbays-to call for women's right to practise sports and PA, as well as to promote the culture of PA and sports, among Saudi women (Abdullatif, 2013; Hurley, 2019; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018; Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa, 2020).

Social media has facilitated novel forms of engagement that extend beyond specific causes, providing avenues for expressing citizenship, particularly for social groups that have historically faced challenges in having their voices acknowledged (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). This holds particularly true for certain Muslim women who are actively working to shape

public perceptions and challenge stereotypes surrounding them, responding to the increasing prevalence of Islamophobia, racism, and sexism (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020).

Within the sports domain, social media platforms are utilised by influencers and female athletes to engage in self-representation and self-branding. This practice aims to enhance their visibility and serves as a medium for digital sports activism. Through these efforts, they actively challenge prevailing stereotypes and cultural gender norms associated with women's sports, ultimately striving to bring about social change (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). This research aims to determine how social media campaigns focused on PA and sports are being received by Saudi young women exposed to these activist messages. To provide the theoretical framework of this study, this chapter is organised into digital activism; digital feminist activism; and digital activism, sportswomen, and social media influencers.

3.2. Digital Activism

Digital activism denotes "both to the digital technology that is used in a given activism campaign and to the economic, social and political context in which such technology use occurs" (Joyce, 2010, P. 2). It refers to "political participation, activities and protests organised in digital networks beyond representational politics" (Karatzogianni, 2015, p. 1). It relates to political conduct by non-state actors and the creation of new social and political formations, including social movements, protest organisations, and civil society organisations, which are independent of government and corporate influence and aim to reform or revolutionise society (Karatzogianni, 2015). Digital activism is a social activism digitally mediated to promote social change (George and Leidner, 2019). This form of activism is centred on communicating ideas, messages, and images and hence not only technological but also has

political and cultural dimensions (Gerbaudo, 2017). There are various forms of activity that can be described as activism, ranging from "hacktivism" to "hashtag activism" (further discussion about hashtag activism will be presented in Sub-Section 3.4.1.) that utilised digital media for a social or political purpose (Gerbaudo, 2017; Yang, 2016). The term "hacktivism" referred to the practice of hacking for social or political causes. Governments, organisations, and individuals are the targets of hackers (George and Leidner, 2019). An event or a policy, or when one group appears to have an edge over another, is the cause of hacking. It is implemented through the code of a computer, exposing information, destroying data, or disrupting operations (George and Leidner, 2019).

Digital activism is relatively new, but its development can be traced across several time periods. Karatzogianni (2015) identified "four waves" of digital activism. The first one started from 1994 to 2001 during which the rise of networked computers gave way to the online transfer of ethnic and religious conflicts in China, Sri Lanka, Kosovo, and Israel-Palestine. During this time period, social movements and protests were powered by the extensive adoption of available information and communication technologies (ICT) e.g., the Zapatista movement in Mexico in 1994; the anti-globalisation protests in Seattle, and the birth of IndyMedia in 1999; and the overthrow of President Estrada in the Philippines mobilised primarily through mobile phones in 2011. As the new millennium started, digital activism rose as a force to contend with (Karatzogianni, 2015). The second wave, covering 2001 to 2007, began with the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. and was dominated by the mobilisations against the Iraq and Afghanistan wars through digital activism (Karatzogianni, 2015). From 2007 to 2010, the third wave happened, starting with the South Ossetian and Georgian conflict. This wave saw how the Green Movement rose in Iran which attempted to overthrow the regime of then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009; the Google censorship case in China in 2010; and

the series of mobilisations by the anti-austerity movement in Athens in May 2010 (Karatzogianni, 2015). The fourth wave happened between 2010 and 2014, and was characterised by the WikiLeaks video release in 2010; the Arab Spring Uprisings in the MENA region; the Occupy movement, and succeeding Occupy protests around the globe. The Snowden revelations also happened during this wave, including the Sony hack in late 2014, which pushed digital activism further (Karatzogianni, 2015).

In contrast, Gerbaudo (2017) only referred to two waves of digital activism. The first one was the popularisation of the Internet and the World Wide Web during the 1990s, involving various initiatives and projects undertaken by technology and media activists during the antiglobalisation movement, including alternative mailing lists and early groups of hackers. Meanwhile, the rise of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which has been synonymous with the rise of hacker collectives e.g., Anonymous and Lulzsec alongside the 15M and Occupy Wall Street movement (Gerbaudo, 2017), comprised the second wave.

However, Kaun and Uldam (2018) have raised criticism against these periodisations, contending that they primarily concentrate on the technological aspects, ideological shifts, and socio-political environment during the emergence of digital activism. One example is Gerbaudo (2017), who critiques the notion of technological determinism and instead suggests an ideological examination of digital activism, which proves valuable when considering political and contextual factors. However, as Kaun and Uldam (2018) proposed that even this approach fails to fully acknowledge the distinctive features of activism across various digital media and formats (Kaun and Uldam, 2018).

For Kaun and Uldam (2018), It is essential to perceive technology as a cultural entity and examine it within the broader context of social and political structures, rather than viewing it

as completely detached. Consequently, researchers began exploring digital technologies as encompassing "technical artifacts, communicative practices, and institutional arrangements." (p. 2102). The advent of these new technologies as material artifacts or devices has enhanced people's capacity to engage in interactions and exchange meaningful content. Over time, activists have developed specific practices, leveraging these material artifacts within institutional frameworks and civic culture (Kaun and Uldam, 2018). As activism unfolded in response to social circumstances, technology, including digital media, also evolved accordingly. This allowed for the shaping of digital technologies in alignment with the prevailing social, economic, and political context. Simultaneously, it transformed the landscape of self-expression, political engagement, and activism (Kaun and Uldam, 2018).

In their 2013 study on the Arab Spring uprisings, Wolfsfeld and his colleagues underscored the significance of adopting a contextual approach to digital activism. They argued that when studying the role of social media in social movements, it is crucial to prioritise and consider politics analytically and chronologically. Neglecting the political environment in which social media exists and operates would be an oversight. Wolfsfeld and his colleagues (2013) examined two key elements: the extent of individuals' unrestricted and unfiltered access to social media, and their level of motivation to engage in street demonstrations.

This set of research suggests the importance of context to better understand social media's role in social change. This study will fall squarely into this category as it is particularly interested in how contextual aspects contribute to women's understandings of digital campaigning around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. By contrast, much of the literature focused on digital activism within Western countries and in the Eastern world, has looked at how women use social media platforms as a medium through which they challenge dominant

stereotypes and cultural gender norms around the topic (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). This study starts by looking at context and understanding before studying uses.

3.3. The Debate Over Digital Activism

A review of literature, specifically on the development of digital activism reveals a number of academic accounts that have argued that the intricacies of society where digital platforms play an increasingly relevant role required a fundamental reconceptualisation of activism (e.g., Gerbaudo, 2017; Carty and Onyett, 2006; Papacharissi, 2002; Wolfsfeld et al, 2013; Kaun and Uldam, 2018). However, there were debates on the benefits of new communication technologies. There were those who pointed to its utopian aspects. Sivitanides and Shan (2011) argued that due to the networked nature of new technologies, social media provided people with a platform to engage outside of traditional hierarchical power structures. Compared to a hierarchical setup in which all power emanated from the top, new technologies changed the power dynamics with a more even, or as some argue, a better power distribution between peers. It is hoped that these power dynamics within digital media will upend the nature of power in the real world, as digital media become deeply embedded in people's lives (Sivitanides and Shan, 2011). Furthermore, Sivitanides and Shan (2011) put forward another principle of digital optimism, stating that technology is "socially constructed". Accordingly, users construct the meaning and the value of technology by how they use it, for instance, by using an entertainment platform like YouTube to transmit alternative political content.

However, there is increasing concern about the problems that new communication technologies raise. One criticism, among others, of feminist activism, is that scholars have

paid close attention to the way that the rise of digital technologies has increased male surveillance practices of women (Megarry, 2018; Manjikian, 2014; Woodlock, 2017). Manjikian (2014) said, "technologies of surveillance have more often been used against women and provided a greater threat to bodily autonomy for them" (p. 60). The scholar claimed that technological developments have historically made it easier for men to improve their advantage against women in increasingly intimate ways (Megarry, 2018). Landlines have allowed men to anonymously intrude on and harass women through obscene phone calls (Megarry, 2018). Closed Circuit Television cameras (CCTVs) have been used by men to spy on women's bodies, including in public places, whereas mobile phone cameras allowed for more specific, thorough, and discreet observation (Megarry, 2018; Manjikian, 2014).

Men have also used digital media to pursue women and put themselves in complete control. Woodlock 's (2017) study, described how women reported that social media, Facebook in particular, was being used by perpetrators relentlessly to monitor and abuse them. It is possible for a woman's partner or ex-partner to continuously stalk her through shared friends' Facebook accounts even if she blocked him from her own Facebook account. Friendship networks on Facebook were problematic as these allowed perpetrators to spy on and stalk women through friends and family members, especially when tagged on photos or at events, as below:

Women "check in" on Facebook so others can see where they are at any given time. People tag these women in photos or at events so that others can see where they are [and] what they are doing. Stalkers can follow friends, family, and acquaintances, so that even if the women are not friends with them [the stalkers], they can still see what they are doing (Woodlock, 2017, p. 494).

Another concern was that online discussion communities can serve as echo chambers of likeminded individuals (Carty and Onyett, 2006). Carty and Onyett (2006) warned that most of those who engaged in digital activism were likely to be already involved with the issue at the centre of these campaigns, therefore, they did not anymore challenge each other in online communities. This meant that while digital media had the possibility to provide access to needed information and resources for social change, it was not clear whether it can bring new individuals into the movement (Carty and Onyett, 2006).

Another line of argument was built around the issue of trust-building, with regard to mediated social movements (Earl and Garrett, 2017; Haciyakupoglu and Zhang, 2015; Carty and Onyett, 2006; Clark and Themundo, 2003). Haciyakupoglu and Zhang (2015) argued that while social media was an important force that mobilised people in the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, and the Gezi Protests, the crucial role of trust, and the mechanisms which build trust, are still unknown. Haciyakupoglu and Zhang (2015) stated that in an environment where traditional media was often silenced, social media emerged as an unfettered alternative to mainstream media due to it being less regulated, its immediacy, and potentially richer information sources. Although Haciyakupoglu and Zhang (2015) argued that social media served as the main source of information, they also encouraged the dissemination of fabricated information, putting a significant challenge for protestors to determine whose information was trustworthy. Some researchers argued that in online movements, the lack of trust between ICT users rendered online interactions insufficient to persuade others to take part in high-risk actions such as protests on the streets (Haciyakupoglu and Zhang, 2015). Clark and Themundo (2003) concluded that "the Internet is a better medium for disseminating information and opinions rather than for building trust, developing coherence, and resolving controversies" (p. 114).

Finally, concerns have been raised about existing social structures and the unevenness of Internet use (Clark, 2016; Sassi, 2005; Van Deursen and Van Dijk, 2014; Leurs, 2016; Warf and Vincent, 2007). In their investigation of the role of socio-demographic and geographical factors in individual Internet usage, scholars have identified multiple digital divides as a major contention. This includes differences covering social class, gender, education, age, access to computers and the Internet, and having the ability to take advantage of their possibilities. Hence, these authors claimed that the Internet actually reflected realities in the offline world, especially differences, and inequalities in social, economic, and cultural relationships (Van Deursen and Van Dijk, 2014). In Saudi Arabia, age appears to be a key difference, (see Chapter Two for more on this).

One form of digital activism that has been studied as a format in itself is digital feminist activism. The following section reviews existing literature on, with a specific focus on digital feminist activism around PA and sports on social media.

3.4. Digital Feminist Activism

As social media platforms, including social network sites, gained increasing popularity, it is not surprising that young girls and women began to enthusiastically adopt and embrace these platforms for their activism (Clark, 2015). This is not recent, as feminists have long been utilising various forms of media, popular culture, and the internet as means for their activism (Jackson, 2018; Harris, 2010). The Riot Grrrl movement established a fresh wave of feminism that focused on 'girl centred feminism' and is emphasised on concepts such as 'grrrlpower', 'sassiness', and 'autonomy' (Jackson, 2018). Originating in the 1990s within the United States, the Riot Grrrl movement emerged and expanded worldwide, retaining its vibrancy and continued involvement to the present day (Dunn, 2014). The Riot Grrrl movement provided

platforms for young women to express their defiance within popular culture through channels such as fanzines, websites, and punk rock music (Jackson, 2018; Keller, 2012). In the digital world, contemporary feminism is characterised by the presence of spaces where individuals can openly share their concerns, emotions, including anger, and engage in critical discussions (Jackson, 2018).

According to Harris (2008, p. 482), modern technologies were crucial for enabling political participation for young people as these have created so-called "new directions" for activism, particularly for young women. These include blogs and hashtags, YouTube videos, Tumblr and mobile phone apps (Loney-Howes, 2020; Jackson, 2018). In *Virtual Femininities: Girls' Blogging Communities, Feminist Activism, and Participatory Politics*, Keller (2012) described girls' blogs as a 'subaltern counter-public', a forum for socially engaged debate and exchange while marginalised by mainstream politics. These counter-publics recast their identities and need for the purpose of reducing their disadvantages in official public spheres, and, therefore, they were viewed as agential and creative. Keller drew on Fraser's (1989) notion of counterpublic, which referred to "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invented and circulated counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Graham and Smith, 2016, p. 433-434). It served as "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment...and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics" (Graham and Smith, 2016, p. 434).

This "new direction" in feminism has been referred to as the "fourth wave" of feminism (Munro, 2013). The fourth wave feminism emerged after the third wave feminism. Munro (2013); Walseth (2015) pointed out that any general definition of feminism would undoubtedly be somewhat controversial; however, it seems undeniable that much of the

attention in feminist theory is devoted to the broader issue of women's discrimination. Women's discrimination has been explained by a variety of theories, among one of them is through different waves of feminism (Walseth, 2015). Early wave feminism fought for voting rights and abolition, while second wave feminism, which emerged in the late 1960s, focused on wage equity and established 'gender' and 'sexism' as key concepts (Munro, 2013; Walseth, 2015).

The third wave of feminism which often referred to the period that led to the widespread rejection of essentialism, challenging the kind of fixed-gender identity on which the first and second waves were based. This third wave of feminism emphasised contradiction, multiplicity, and difference (Walseth, 2015). This meant greater emphasis on the fluidity and new forms of femininities of gender than on the reproduction of gender (Walseth, 2015).

The fourth wave of feminism is still evolving; however, some scholars have argued that it was influenced by the ideas of the third wave of feminism which focused on micropolitics and challenging sexism and misogyny (Munro, 2013). Bruene and Capous-Desyllas (2020) characterised the "fourth wave" as a "focus on various women through an intersectional lens" (p. 92). Intersectionality observes "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Stride, 2016, p. 681). It acknowledges the significance of individual multiple identities and the broader social structures while recognising how these different levels intersect to lead to power relations, difference, and discrimination (Stride, 2016). Baer (2016) argued that digital technologies serve as a "space where feminists can learn from each other about why things some feminists see as harmless can be hurtful and offensive to others. Most feminists know

about intersectionality, but far from all of us know every way in which intersectional oppression works" (Baer, 2016, p. 18). By bringing together various feminist constituencies, digital technologies have been described as facilitating new sorts of intersectional conversations (Baer, 2016).

Whether or not, Jackson (2018) argued, we have arrived at a "fourth wave", there seems to be a consensus that the Internet has increasingly become an important tool for political practices among young feminists (Jackson, 2018; Baer, 2016). It is, however, as discussed above, a somewhat contentious site that raises a number of questions.

3.4.1. Hashtag Feminism

In recent years, hashtag activism has emerged as one of the most interesting developments in digital activism (Yang, 2016). The term hashtag activism first appeared in news coverage in 2011 and was described as "the creation and proliferation of online activism stamped with a hashtag" (Jackson et al, 2020, p. 32). A hashtag, designed by a 'hash' symbol (#), was defined as "a keyword assigned to the information that describes a tweet and aids in searching" (Small, 2011, p. 872). Hashtag (#) was originally mostly associated with Twitter, but it has been increasingly applied to many online communities such as Instagram (Gilkerson and Berg, 2017). People and activist groups have used hashtags to organise and control the online conversation on social media platforms (Gilkerson and Berg, 2017). Hashtags have become viable and effective strategic mechanisms, which people and activist groups have utilised to explicitly shame companies, pressure them to action, and even amplified their voices to be heard by the larger public (Gilkerson and Berg, 2017).

An increasing number of studies have highlighted the potential role of 'hashtag feminism', in feminist activism. For instance, Clark (2016); Meyer (2014); Horeck (2014), have emphasised the ability of hashtag feminism to disrupt oppressive discourses (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) that were produced in news, entertainment, and commercial media. Other articles published by Thrift (2014); Rentschler (2015); Linabary et al (2020) have emphasised the potential of feminist hashtags such as #YesAllWomen, #SafetyTipsForLadies, and #Whylstayed to expose gendered violence and abuse. These scholars pointed out how hashtags were unique in their ability to increase the visibility of feminist issues and provide immediate responses to events in real-time (Linabary et al, 2020). Such visibility, according to these scholars, allowed for the construction and amplification of counter-discourses within online spaces (Linabary et al, 2020). In the hashtag #YesAllWomen, for example, females' personal stories of gender-based violence fought "exceptionalist discourses" surrounding the Isla Vista killings (Thrift, 2014, p. 1091). Accordingly, the hashtag was not only praised for making visible women's lived experiences following the tragedy of Isla Vista, but it also served as space for "critical, feminist intervention in how we conceptualised and chose to narrate misogynist aggression and gender violence in American culture" (Thrift, 2014, p. 1091). This is made feasible, in part, by the fact that hashtags, in addition to being searchable, can also become highly visible through mechanisms for detecting "trending" hashtags on social media platforms, and by being covered by the established media as news stories in themselves (Linabary et al, 2020; Latina and Docherty, 2014).

Given that the use of hashtags may allow individuals and activists to increase the visibility of a particular issue, an important part of this thesis is to examine how hashtag activism is perceived by Saudi young women as a means to demand personal and social change in their sports and PA campaigns.

However, some scholars have questioned the ability of hashtag feminism to effect substantive change. The connections between individualism, digital space, and neoliberal capitalism raise concerns about depoliticising feminist activism, especially as it appears online through personalised narratives (Linabary et al, 2020). The claim "the personal is political", which highlights the impact of socio-cultural, political, and economic arrangements on every aspect of women's private lives, remains key to feminist activism. However, some have argued that, under neoliberal capitalism, the political has been reduced to the personal, undermining the power of activist groups to share their own lived experiences of oppression (Linabary et al, 2020; Mohanty, 2013). In this way, some scholars have questioned whether or not the "microrebellions" of digital feminism" can truly lead to structural changes (Baer, 2016, p, 18).

In the context of sports, Ahmad and Thorpe (2020) explored how Muslim sportswomen have turned to hashtag campaigns as a space through which they could speak on the issues that affected them. #FIBAAllowHijab movement is one example. This was a campaign against the ban on women wearing head coverings while playing imposed by the International Basketball Federation. This campaign began in 2015 and succeeded in overturning the ban in May 2017. For one of the participants in Ahmad and Thorpe's (2020) study, Asma, a young European basketball player, Twitter was the appropriate platform through which she campaigned about the challenges faced by Muslim sportswomen. She was a leading figure in the #FIBAAllowHijab movement, actively campaigning using the hashtag to call out the discrimination faced by Muslim women in basketball. She always used the #FIBAAllowHijab hashtag when posting and re-tweeting content related to the cause on her websites and social media accounts. When

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⁶In the context of a country such as Saudi Arabia, the concept of "micro-rebellions" or "personal revolutions," as Saudi blogger Nora Abdulkarim (2013) called them, refers to these micro-rebellions where bodies engage in activities beyond the old forms of feminist mobilisation in the region. These forms have so far marginalised the sexuality and body and, instead, they have prioritised reforming state laws (Salime, 2014).

the ban was finally lifted, she made public her celebration again through the Twitter platform (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020).

3.4.2. Digital Feminist Activism in Saudi Arabia

Throughout the years, ideologies on gendered power relations that were rooted in social traditions and culture, have been legitimised in Saudi Arabia by their erroneous linkages to Islamic teachings (Hamdan, 2005; Ibrahim, 2018). This was because patriarchal interpretations of the Quran were being done in isolation, without regard to context, in order to perpetuate certain beliefs and reinforce injustices against women and their so-called "inferiority" (Qazi, 2016; Ibrahim, 2018). In articulating such an idea, a social scientist scholar, Sfeir (1985) said that the Prophet Muhammad has only set general guidelines for purity and chastity that encompassed the sexes in which he exhorted them to "guard their modesty or private parts" (p. 295). Despite this, women were subjected to more regulations than men, particularly concerning dress. In Verse 31 of the Quran, women were asked not to show their beauty and to be modest by covering their bosoms, while in Verse 59, women were asked to "throw around them their mantle when going out" (Sfeir, 1985, p. 296). Sfeir (1985) stated these verses have been interpreted by some Muslim scholars and legislators as a way to urge women to be properly covered. Furthermore, Sfeir (1985) noted that the Quran has only one verse concerning seclusion that was specific to women: "remain in your home. Do not exhibit yourself as did the women in the times of ignorance" (p. 296). Sfeir (1985) stated many Muslim clerics have used this statement of the Quran as a justification for a secular custom. Walseth and Fasting (2003); Pfister (2002); De Knop et al (1996) argued that these Islamic rules, among others, about dress regulations and the seclusion of women, were established by men to control women and to maintain their power. De Knop et al (1996) commented that within Saudi Arabian culture, the position of women was not determined by their biological specificity, but by their 'active female sexuality'. According to Walseth and Fasting (2003), Islam believed that women have strong sexuality. Women were often considered less moral than men because they are perceived to have less control over their sexuality (Walseth and Fasting, 2003). Therefore, the woman is seen as a seductive being, but at the same time, she is easy to tempt. Because of such an idea, women can easily cause *fitna* i.e., chaos or temptation in society, and therefore must remain under control (Walseth and Fasting, 2003; De Knop et al, 1996). This has led many Muslim feminists, as will be discussed in the following section, to voice their concerns in relation to patriarchal practices and traditions in their societies (I addressed some of these patriarchal practices and traditions in Chapter Two) and demanded for social change and reforms (Jawad et al, 2010; Ibrahim, 2018).

In the past few years, many feminists in Saudi Arabia have turned to social media as a powerful space to put the spotlight on feminist issues, including the right to drive and an end to the male guardianship system (Abdullatif, 2013; Hurley, 2019; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018).

#Women2Drive: In 2011, Saudi women activists began an online campaign to push for their right to drive. This was an evolution of the long-term struggle of Saudi women who have been campaigning against the ban on women drivers. In fact, this long campaign has caused the arrest and imprisonment of some of the activists. Manal Al-Sharif, the lead in Saudi women's activism against the male guardianship system (known as *Mahram*), was the one who launched the Facebook campaign #Women2Drive in 2011. She urged Saudi women to get into their cars and simply drive (Ibrahim, 2018). Al-Sharif started the campaign by posting a video of herself driving on her social media accounts. This video went viral online, leading to Al-

Sharif's eventual arrest and imprisonment, and eventual release. Al-Sharif's action inspired many women in Saudi Arabia to defy the ban and drive their cars. It started a wave of civil disobedience, with Saudi women posting videos or photographs of themselves behind the wheel on their social media platforms (Ibrahim, 2018). This was a very profound development because, in 2011, Saudi Arabia remained as the sole country in the world where women drivers were banned (Ibrahim, 2018). The campaign forced the Saudi government to remove the ban and allow Saudi women the right to drive in 2018. Following this, Al-Sharif referred to the government's decision as "driving to freedom" and was just the first step towards reform in Saudi Arabia that should aim at breaking down the oppressive male guardianship system (Ibrahim, 2018).

#EndMaleGuardianship: In 2016, Saudi women activists started a landmark activism in Saudi Arabia to end the *mahram* or male guardianship system (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019; Alsahi, 2019). In Saudi Arabia, (see Chapter Two for more on this), male guardianship was a legal requirement for Saudi women. Saudi women need permission from their male guardian (*mahram*), who can be their father, husband, son, or nearest male kin, before undertaking activities such as marriage, study, travel, accessing healthcare, or for work. Al Lily (2011) noted that 'since [the guardianship] is embedded in the [Saudi] national culture, officials 'may ask women for their guardian's consent even where no law or guideline requires such consent' (p. 120).

While there have been many endeavours in the past to reform women's status, none of these managed to change the male guardianship system. One of the catalysts to this campaign was the arrest and imprisonment of women's rights activists Aziza Al-Yousef and Eman Al-Nafian in 2013 while challenging the driving ban on Saudi women. They were only released when

their guardians arrived. As a result, Al-Yousef started campaigning against the male guardianship system. She petitioned the Shura Council, the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia for this (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). She turned to social media, especially Twitter, to amplify her campaign against the male guardianship system. In Saudi Arabia, street protests and public expressions of dissent were not allowed and had severe penalties. However, the authorities were more tolerant of social media activism. Online campaigns were considered safe spaces for campaigning for women's rights. It was through social media that Saudi feminist activists amplified their campaign with hashtags in Arabic and English. #EndMaleGuardianship and #lamMyOwnGuardian soon began trending. Although Al-Yousef's campaign was not the only campaign to call for a change in women's status, it was the most successful in generating awareness and support at national and international levels (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019).

In mid-July 2016, the Twitter hashtag #انا ولية أمري (#lamMyOwnGuardian) gained momentum, after the publication of a report by Human Rights Watch, titled "Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System". This report highlighted the male guardianship system as "the most significant impediment to women's rights in the country despite limited reforms over the last decade" (Alsahi, 2019, p. 303). After this, several attempts were made to mobilise support with approximately 15,000 women signing an online petition for abolishing the country's male guardianship system. This petition was submitted to the Saudi Arabian authorities on September 26, after King Salman's office received around 2,500 telegrams directly sent by women pushing for the cause (Alsahi, 2019).

There is also evidence that Saudi women have specifically turned to social media as a space to demand their rights to practise sports and physical activities (Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa and Leber, 2018).

LetHerGetFat: In 2009, Saudi Arabian authorities closed down gyms exclusively catering to women which were not under the management of government hospitals or clinics. This happened when clerics claimed that these gyms are for "shamelessness," and would be a way for women to abandon their responsibilities in their homes (Elouazi, 2018). This resulted in the formation of an activist group of Saudi women, and the launching of an online campaign called LetHerGetFat. They blamed the authorities for the insufficiency of access to exclusive gyms for women who prefer to do their physical exercises in places outside of their homes, given that they were not allowed to use facilities used by the men (Elouazi, 2018).

#RunningAbays: Two basic exercises, walking and running, have been promoted on social media platforms in Saudi Arabia. Jeddah Running Collective (JRC) advocated it as a means for personal and social change. JRC has continuously encouraged women to engage in running by holding regular training sessions. The public has been informed of upcoming training schedules and competitions through social media updates. Races have been held in Hejaz (Western region of Saudi Arabia) as well as the promotion of running with abayas, tagged with #runningabays (Gustafsson, 2017). One notable event that was held by JRC was a simultaneous fun run in three different cities in Saudi Arabia, in celebration of International Women's Day, which was aired live on social media. Slogans included "We are women hear us roar/In numbers too big to ignore!" and "female running renegades" (Lysa and Leber, 2018). According to JRC, since 2013, they have developed changes in sports narratives. JRC is continuously growing in the conservative capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. JRC does not just

facilitate fun runs for women, but the group also exerts efforts in pushing social barriers by holding runs in public places and in busy urban areas. In 2012, for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia, two female athletes made it to the Olympics. Up to this day, JRC still helps in carving out and maintaining spaces for women (Lysa and Leber, 2018).

Indeed, in Saudi Arabia, the #EndMaleGuardinship campaign was historical, leading to King Salman issuing a decree in 2017 to review the male guardianship system and eliminating some of its provisions, which has now allowed women to access all services (e.g., obtain a passport, study, travel, work, accessing healthcare, etc.,) without the need of permission from a male guardian. The other famously successful campaign was #Women2Drive in which the Saudi government granted women the right to drive in 2018 (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). In both campaigns, the use of social media and hashtags was crucial in mobilising women. The direct sharing of the Human Rights Watch Report to the Saudi King's Twitter account and posting videos of the abuse they suffered from their male guardians attracted public attention, were covered by mainstream media, and eventually, paved the way for reforms on Saudi women's social status at a fast pace (Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019).

When it comes to sports and PA, there was also evidence that social media brought about a new way for Saudi women to speak on a wide range of issues that affected their participation in sports in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it has been discussed how social media has been also used by activist groups in the country to organise events, and competitions and continuously encouraged women to challenge social norms by holding regular training sessions for them in public spaces and in busy areas (Lysa and Leber, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Elouazi, 2018).

3.5. Digital Activism, Sportswomen and Social Media Influencers

Social media platforms not only have the potential to amplify the visibility of both individual and collective social causes but also offer a platform for historically marginalised individuals to express their voices and be recognised (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). This holds particularly true for Muslim women who are actively striving to reshape global perceptions and attitudes towards them, especially in light of the increasing prevalence of Islamophobia, racism, and sexism (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). "Self-representation" is now more known to refer to "the activities of participating audiences in digital culture, alongside other related terms like the performance of self and presentation of self and most recently, self-revelation" (Thumim, 2012, p. 6).

Research exploring self-representation on social media has indicated that individuals utilise these platforms as a means to attain recognition and popularity (Marwick, 2015) while other studies focused on self-representation and hijab use (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018) and self-representation and sexuality (Tiidenberg and Gomez Cruz, 2015). For example, in their study of Indonesian Muslim women's social media use, particularly Instagram, Baulch and Pramiyanti (2018) showed how hijabers use captions to interpret their posts using Quran and Hadith references. In this way, they can claim their Instagram activities as forms of *dakwah* (i.e., the call, invitation or challenge to Islam), thus framing hijaberness as a mode of Islamic communication that needed to be analysed in the context of contemporary developments in Islamic knowledge mediation. According to Baulch and Pramiyanti (2018), by claiming that the sharing of images of their bodies is a form of *dakwah*, hijabers demonstrated how Muslim authority has fragmented due to electronic mediation (e.g., audio tapes, see for example, Echchaibi, 2010), and the increasing influence female consumers play in reinterpreting scripture (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018).

An increasing number of scholars have focused on how self-representation can be used to improve understanding through issues such as identity politics (e.g., Yadlin-Segal, 2019; Senft and Baym, 2015). Senft and Baym (2015), for instance, stated that "self-representation can take a stand against racist, classist, misogynist, homophobic, ageist or ableist views" (p. 1597), where people can be more outspoken of their experiences through social media and build support, advocacy and social activist communities (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). An example, discussed earlier, was when Saudi women posted selfies of themselves while they were driving in a country that does not allow women to drive (Senft and Baym, 2015).

In the context of sports and PA, an increasing number of studies are looking at how athletes, sportswomen, and social media influencers were using social media to gain greater visibility and as forms of digital sports activism (e.g., Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b; Chawansky, 2016). Thus, in the sections to follow, I will outline how sportswomen and social media influencers use self-representation in digital sports activism.

3.5.1. Self-Branding

Today, Banet-Weiser (2012) argued, a key strategy for individual promotion is through "self-branding". The term self-branding, which is sometimes known as personal branding, refers to a "self-presentation strategy that requires viewing oneself as a consumer product and selling this image to others" (Marwick, 2015, p. 140). The exhortations for individuals to advance self-branding began with marketing professionals but rapidly spread across a variety of different industries (Meisner and Ledbetter, 2022; Bendisch et al, 2013; Khamis et al, 2017). The increasing number of books, websites, seminars, and workshops that are dedicated to its principles and promotion is an indication of its popularity and appeal (Khedher, 2014; Khamis et al, 2017).

Self-branding revolves around building a unique selling point, or a compelling identity that engages with their target audiences' interests and needs (Khamis et al, 2017). This idea has been around since the 1920s but gained momentum in the past 20 years (Khamis et al, 2017). Banet-Weiser's Authentic™: *The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* book is worth noting as she has brought a further understanding of self-branding, emphasising that "brand relationships have increasingly become cultural contexts for everyday living, individuals identity, and affective relationships" (p. 4). Banet-Weiser (2012) encouraged us to consider branding beyond the marketing perspectives to focus on the "ways that people use the logic, strategies, and language of brands as a dominant way to express our politics, our creativity, our religious practices—indeed, our very selves" (p. 3).

Duffy and Hund (2015) noted that self-branding has been associated with gendered discourses which highlights personal choices, self-expression, and independence. Gill (2007) highlighted the similarity between post-feminism and neoliberalism in terms of encouraging individuals to "render one's life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice and autonomy" (p. 154). In examining his narrative's linkage with digital media, Banet-Weiser (2012) noted that post-feminism and interactivity make self-branding crucial. Interactivity, along with post-feminism, created a 'neoliberal moral framework' that encouraged self-branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 56). In girls and young women, this self-brand is created through bodily display, authentic narratives, and cultivation of affect (Duffy and Hund, 2015). Indeed, the way women have used social media was significant in the light of feminist agendas; as discussed above, they have used social media as a space to increase awareness, establish events, empower each other, and mobilise, as well as to advocate for individual and collective social endeavours. Social media was also important as a space to increase the

visibility of women and push their own agenda in the digital space. Within this, women have used self-branding strategies in the presentation and promotion of themselves as empowered individuals with the entrepreneurial spirit. In the next section, I will engage with these debates, particularly in relation to the use by Saudi sports influencers of social media and their online self-branding as a way to represent and self-promote, as well as to advertise themselves and their sports.

3.5.2. Self-Branding and Physical Activity/Sport Social Media Influencers

It has been pointed out that there is considerable academic research and discussion on the phenomenon of social media influencers who have expanded their influence because of self-branding powered by digital technology. According to Hearn and Schoenhoff (2016):

The social media influencer works to generate a form of "celebrity" capital by cultivating as much attention as possible and crafting an authentic "personal brand" via social networks, which can subsequently be used by companies and advertisers for consumer outreach (p. 194).

The success of social media influencers is determined by the gains coming from their wide social networks and the benefits received from the intimate and more 'trustworthy' relationships developed with their audiences (Khamis et al, 2017).

Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a) examined how five very prominent sportswomen-Maria Sharapova, Serena Williams, Ronda Rousey, Danica Patrick, and Alana Blanchard-presented themselves within the neoliberal post-feminist framework. Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a) found that while female athletes have long been marginalised and under-represented across

mainstream media as well as online media outlets, social media has provided them with a powerful platform through which they can redress this lack of attention, and even challenge normative and sexual identities in sports. Within social media, female athletes were implementing strategies for presenting themselves that harness post-feminist themes which included self-disclosure, self-love, and self-empowerment (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a). Selfies without make-up were an example of this self-love discourse. Maria Sharapova posted on her Instagram an image of her in a bathrobe with no makeup, her face reflected in a mirror, which seemed to celebrate real-ness and authenticity (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a). Meanwhile, an American former racing driver, Danica Patrick, celebrated another self-love discourse through posts that referenced yoga regimes and clean eating, a narrative that talks about taking care of oneself, which was not tied to preconceived standards or to attract the attention of males (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a).

3.5.3. Self-Branding and Physical Activity/Sport Social Media Influencers in Saudi Arabia

To date, the body of scholarship which examined how Middle Eastern, in particular, Saudi sports influencers were engaging with social media and their online self-branding is limited. Ahmad (2019) focused on sportswomen's use of social media in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Iran. Ahmad (2019) found how digital media provided unique opportunities for sports influencers to self-brand and self-present about themselves and their sports and also to raise awareness about certain issues, gain followers, inspire others, and offer opportunities to carefully consider cultural relations. Sarah, a 33-year-old- CrossFit trainer and competitor from Saudi Arabia who was featured in Ahmad's (2019) study, found social media as an important tool for developing her brand and inspiring other women to live actively. In her videos online, Sarah

showed her training, eating habits (healthy or unhealthy) clothing choices (mostly sports clothing), and other sports-related activities (e.g., speaking at public events). Sarah used hashtags like #Reebok, #Nike, #Puma, along with #ArabWomen, #sport, and #lifestyle etc., to reach a wider audience (Ahmad, 2019). Due to her Instagram account and wide following, Sarah was able to work with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to lead local fitness and/or sporting events, as well as feature in several news articles and video promos and in several regional magazines (Ahmad, 2019). Sarah also carefully considered what and how she shared content with her audiences, as she stated:

I understand how social media works. If someone wants to show their abs, or show their whatever, just for more likes, then okay, but you can't fool your true followers for long. If you really want to inspire people, they will not get inspired by your bum in the camera (Ahmad, 2019, p. 102).

For Sarah, the number of followers or 'likes' was not important. What she found crucial was using social media to empower other Saudi women to live a healthy lifestyle and develop physical capital, as such an act is considered unusual, particularly for women living in Saudi Arabia. Sarah, like many other sportswomen in Ahmad's (2019) study was aware of the post of others on social media, but she refrained from mimicking their movements or posting 'sexy selfies'. Women like Sarah shared images that were focused more on their sports, lifestyle, and identity; avoiding objectification/sexualisation of the body and sharing images to build their brand and engaging with their audience (Ahmad, 2019).

Therefore, it can be seen how social media have provided unique opportunities for Saudi sports influencers to promote self-brand and self-presentation, through which they draw attention to themselves, and their sports, to promote awareness as well as to empower other

Saudi women. The discussions also revealed that Saudi sports influencers carefully considered how and what they shared with their audiences, with cultural issues central to their decision making. In fact, the present study investigates how cultural relations shape the way sports influencers are understood and experienced by young Saudi women.

3.6. Concluding Discussion

This chapter reviews three main bodies of research focused on digital activism, digital feminist activism, and digital activism, sportswomen, and social media influencers, respectively. Within this chapter, the term digital feminist activism and examples of how social media platforms have been used in feminist campaigns to advocate for political and social change have been assessed. The developments of digital feminist activism have been reviewed, with scholars linking it to awareness-raising from the second wave of feminism (Linabary et al, 2020). Others have claimed it as a "fourth wave" which involved a sharing of voices, engaging with global politics, and with an intersectional lens (Jackson, 2018). The chapter also reviews the role of feminist hashtags, in particular their unique power in highlighting feminist issues, which paved the way to achieve personal and social change in their sport and PA campaign. Analysing this set of scholarship reinforced the need to develop a fundamental reconceptualisation of mediated social movement (e.g., Carty and Onyett, 2006; Gerbaudo, 2017; Papacharissi, 2002; Wolfsfeld et al, 2013; Kaun and Uldam, 2017). According to these scholars, research exploring feminist activism must consider the ways it is both used and limited in digital spaces. More specifically, it was key to acknowledging the intersection between changing technology, neoliberalism, and political feminism (Linabary et al, 2020; Keller, 2012).

The chapter has engaged with the theory of self-representation in relation to the study of sportswomen, social media influencers, and digital sports activism more broadly (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). Attention has been drawn to the term "self-branding" and its link to gender discourse and post-feminism, which highlights independence, expression of one's choice, and ways of expressing oneself that began in the consumer marketplace (Duffy and Hund, 2015). In this chapter, I discuss how sportswomen and social media influencers have been using social media in presenting their sporting and feminine selves within a neoliberal post-feminist framework in which empowerment and entrepreneurship were celebrated (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a). Social media has provided female athletes with a powerful platform through which they can redress this lack of attention from mainstream media and online media outlets, and even challenge dominant stereotypes and cultural gender norms and create social change concerning women's sports (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b).

The existing literature that I have discussed concerning women's digital activism in the field of PA and sports mainly focuses on how women use social media platforms as a medium through which they can challenge dominant stereotypes and cultural gender norms and create social change concerning women's sports. However, little is known about how social media campaigns and influencers focused on PA and sports are being received by Saudi young women who are exposed to their activist messages.

Chapter 4. Research Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into six sections. It begins with an overview of the research background, the questions, and the rationale behind the selection of an abductive, grounded approach. This is followed by a discussion of the sampling strategy, how access to participants was gained, and how they were recruited. The chapter then provides an overview of the overall methodology. It concludes with a description of the chosen techniques for data analysis and a discussion on the ethical issues involved.

4.2. The Research Background and Questions

This study sets out to explore the way social media campaigning contributes to Saudi women's understandings of PA and sports in relation to gender norms in Saudi Arabia. It also seeks to determine how these campaigns are received by Saudi women who are exposed to these activist messages.

To fulfil the study's aim, the following research questions (RQs) are posed:

RQ 1: How do Saudi women understand and experience PA and sports? Do they see any potential challenges in engaging with them?

RQ 2: How do Saudi women understand digital campaigning targeting women around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia?

RQ 3: How and why Saudi women use social media? How do Saudi women understand the role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes?

4.3. Research Paradigm: Rationale to Adopt an Abductive Grounded Research Approach

This research attempts to explore Saudi women's understandings and experiences of PA, sports and digital campaigning around PA and sports, particularly in relation to gender norms in Saudi Arabia. Following the constructivism paradigm, this was achieved by utilising a qualitative research approach, one of the premises of which is to "give a voice to women whose life experiences have been silenced or ignored by more standardised survey and research techniques" (Williams and Heikes, 1993, p. 280). Qualitative research allows researchers to identify issues from their participants' points of view and helps to understand the meanings and interpretations that participants give to a phenomenon (Kopala and Suzuki, 1999). Further, a qualitative approach is valuable for studies exploring a relatively new and under-researched area (Al-Saggaf, 2016). Shekedi (2005) argued that an important aspect of qualitative data collection and analysis is "to understand the informants' world within context [...] no phenomenon can be understood outside its culture" (p. 51). Considering this, when conducting this study in a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia, it was crucial to strongly consider the cultural characteristics and context, particularly since religion and culture in Saudi Arabia have strong influences on shaping people's behaviour and attitudes, norms, values and practices (Al-Saggaf, 2004). Therefore, a qualitative approach was deemed to be most appropriate for the objectives and context of this study.

Although findings obtained from a quantitative approach may be more generalisable, the qualitative method I am adopting in this study is committing to an "emic, idiographic, case-

based position that directs attention to the specifics of particular cases" (Shek and Leung, 2014, p. 483). In this study, the participants' experiences, feelings and reflections are key in understanding how PA, sports and digital campaigning around PA and sports are being perceived by critical stakeholders, in this case, university female students (Shek and Leung, 2014).

Among the various analytical methods used for qualitative research (e.g., ethnography, phenomenology, narratives, case study), grounded theory has been increasingly popular in social science research (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). According to Green et al (2009), "grounded theory is widely regarded as a general methodology to build theory, which emerges systematically from continuous interplay between data collection and analysis" (P. 119). Grounded theory is primarily an inductive approach in which researchers move from a collection of empirical observations (data) to developing theory that might explain them, through the interactions between the researcher and the participants in the research process (Rahmani and Leifels, 2018). There are some arguments that the research which has adopted an inductive logic is unlikely to produce an instrumental theory based on the empirical data, without recognising the existing theories (Rahmani and Leifels, 2018). This emphasises the need for researchers to be theoretically sensitive, as a result of being immersed in relevant literatures (Green et al, 2009; Rahmani and Leifels, 2018). Further emphasis has then been given to the idea of an "abductive grounded theory", where new knowledge is developed from a continuous interplay between existing theories as well as empirical data (Green et al, 2009; Rahmani and Leifels, 2018).

4.4. Qualitative Sampling, Study Participants and Recruiting Procedures

4.4.1. Sampling

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is one of the most common techniques used in qualitative research. Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling (Ishak and Abu Bakar, 2014). In this process, the researcher carefully selects samples/units, (e.g., individuals, cases, events) on the basis of their knowledge about or experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Often, pre-selected criteria are used to select the sample which would help answer the research questions (Tolley, 2016).

In comparison to other types of sampling techniques, the sample size investigated in purposive sampling is quite small because the researcher mainly focuses on the best characteristics that serve the purpose of a study (Sim et al, 2018). Therefore, based on my study's aim, which is exploring Saudi women's understandings of digital campaigning around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia, purposive sampling is deemed to be the most appropriate strategy applicable. I believe that selecting the right participants would better ensure the collection of deep and rich data to address the study's research questions.

4.4.2. Study Participants

Participant selection is aligned with the objectives of the study and is very critical. In order to fully explore Saudi women's understandings of digital campaigning on PA and sports, purposive sampling was adopted to recruit participants who could provide typical, as well as divergent, data. Purposive sampling allowed me as a researcher to select participants according to four primary criteria relevant to my study. Participants should be (1) between 18 and 25 years old, (2) users of social media, (3) female Saudi students at King Abdul-Aziz

University in Jeddah, and (4) interested in PA and Sports. The following paragraphs will explore these four criteria in detail.

Participants Must be between 18 and 25 Years Old and They Must Be Users of Social Media

The age group selected for the present study was between 18 and 25 and this rested on the fact that Saudi Arabia consists of a largely young population, up to 60% of whom are aged 25 or less (AlMarzooqi, 2018). It has been reported that Saudi youth are considered to be early adopters and heavy users of social media (Al-Haidari, 2016; Alhamadi, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, for example, a recent report (2021) published by 'We are Social and Hootsuite' showed that the age group 18-34 was adopting social media at the highest level. With the growing influence of social media, particularly among young people, it is important to understand how Saudi young women perceive digital campaigning on issues related to PA and sports in the country.

Participants Must Be Female Saudi Students at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah

The criteria was that all the participants had to be Saudi female students studying at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah. First, the rationale for selecting King Abdul-Aziz University was because of its academic standing and its role in female education. King Abdul-Aziz University was established in 1967 as a private university, and it opened to the public in 1974 (King Abdul-Aziz University, 2021). The University is a pioneer institution in offering educational opportunities to Saudi females. From the time of its establishment, the University

⁷ Digital in Saudi Arabia: All the Statistics You Need in 2021 — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights

paid a great deal of attention in providing higher education for Saudi females, as the two sections (male and female) were inaugurated in the same year, 1968. Since then, the number of students has grown from 68 males and 30 females in 1968 (King Abdul-Aziz University, 2021), to reach 68.001 males and females 61.142 in 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020), making the University one of the most prominent in Saudi Arabia (King Abdul-Aziz University, 2021).

Secondly, the selection of King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah in particular was for pragmatic reasons. I believed that it would be easier for me to access potential participants due to my personal position as a lecturer there. King Abdul-Aziz University has two main campuses, one campus in Jeddah (where I recruited my participants) and another campus in Rabigh (where I work as a lecturer). By recruiting from the Jeddah campus, I was able to avoid any conflict of interest from approaching students whom I may be teaching. According to Greene (2014), being an insider researcher had the potential to help me to access my participants more easily than as an outsider researcher. However, being an insider researcher also risked raising ethical challenges (further discussion about these ethical challenges will be presented in Section 4.7.).

Lastly, this research focuses on university students because the use of social media is found to be high amongst university students in particular. Alwagait et al (2015); Yusuf et al (2016) found that social media play an important role in higher education; these platforms provide an opportunity for Saudi Arabian students to share information, and to build their online communities in collaborating with other students, and so they facilitate the learning and teaching process.

Participants Must Be Interested in Physical Activity and Sports

Last, but not least, targeted participants had to be interested in PA and sports (i.e., doing some types of physical activities whether regularly or not, such as walking, running, swimming, cycling) to be considered potential participants in this study. First, in focusing on PA and sports among university students, I paid special attention to the growing rate of physical inactivity among female university students. For instance, Alzamil et al (2019) investigated the lifestyle and habits of Saudi female university students and found that almost half were insufficiently physically active and 85% of them pursued a sedentary lifestyle. A lack of time, resources and partner support are commonly reported to be the main barriers to PA (Alzamil et al, 2019; Al-Hazzaa, 2018). In addition, recruiting participants who have knowledge of and interest in and actively engage with issues related to PA and sports gives an advantage to the present study. By doing this, I will be able to thoroughly discuss the issues and concerns of the participants and gain a better understanding of their viewpoints. This, as a result, would refine and ensure validity of the research.

4.4.3. Recruiting Procedures

In the present study, the potential participants were recruited through a variety of different methods. This was done because I was interested in recruiting participants from a broad range of social backgrounds. These different methods of recruitment, discussed below, allowed the participants to self-select for participation in this study.

First of all, at the heart of my study are my participants: female Saudi students at King Abdul-Aziz University, Jeddah. Hence, my journey started from King Abdul-Aziz University-in Jeddah.

I first contacted the Research Services Unit at King Abdul-Aziz University asking them to send the study's invitation via email to female students at the University. The invitation included a

description of the nature and the purpose of the study, requirements for participants as well as the researcher's contact details.

Another way to gain access to potential participants was through my own personal networks (Miller and Bell, 2012), and I primarily relied on my colleagues, friends and acquaintances to be introduced to second-or third-degree friends. I also adopted the snowball sampling technique to recruit further participants. This is a technique "for finding research subjects where one subject gives the researcher the name of another, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on. In this method, the sample grows like a rolling snowball" (Cohen and Arieli, 2011, P. 424). Such a technique has a unique advantage particularly in situations where it is difficult to access the target participants because of the sensitivity of the nature of the research (Browne, 2005). Where this study is concerned, it would be expected that Saudi women would hesitate to take part in the study when approached by a stranger asking to gain access to their social media accounts (this was in particular in the second phase of the data collection where I interviewed the participants using the method of scroll back, for more on this see Sub-Section 4.5.2.3.1.). This technique was utilised because of the cultural sensitivity and participants' concerns over their online content. Participants were more likely to trust me and agree to take part in the research when they were introduced to the study by another participant.

Additionally, to maximise the study's chance of identifying participants suitable for the research and also meet the sampling conditions-mentioned in Section 4.2.2., I created social media accounts, in particular Twitter. The reason I used Twitter for participant recruitment was because it is among the social media applications that have become increasingly popular in Saudi Arabia. As of 2022, the current active users of Twitter stand at about 26 million, which

is about 72% of the total population (Global Media Insight, 2022). Twitter, for Saudis, is one of the main platforms where many of their concerns, including those that are related to social, political, or economic issues, are discussed and developed (Madini and Nooy, 2014; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019).

In relation to the population of the current study, Twitter is popular among university students; through such platforms they can approach the most important issues that are relevant to their university studies and they can benefit from them, in terms of getting the latest news, activities and courses. Accounts, such as the official account of King Abdul-Aziz University, teaching staff at the university and an educational account such as Skaau, are open and can be accessed easily by students, providing abundant opportunities to find participants suitable for the purpose of the current study. As such, I approached these accounts on Twitter and asked them to retweet the study's invitation that I previously shared on the research account.

It is worth noting that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 global health crisis, which caused the closure of many public buildings and university facilities that were supposed to be used to disseminate the study's flyers. As a result, this option was not available for this study. However, this was not of very great concern for me because through the forms of recruitment discussed above, I was able to recruit enough participants for my research (a list of the research participants is available in Appendix I).

All the participants were encouraged to contact me through email, mobile, or even through social media platforms such as WhatsApp to express interest in participating in this project. In Saudi Arabia, people usually add each other as contacts on WhatsApp to communicate more easily. Once the participants contacted me and expressed interest in this project, I arranged

a brief meeting with them to fully explain the project and answer any questions. In addition, my second reason for conducting these virtual meetings with the participants was also to establish good rapport. The issues of building rapport and establishing trust are especially important to any qualitative research that requires an interview with the participants (Dempsey et al, 2016). Through these meetings, I felt that I was able to gain the trust of my participants and get to know them better as individuals. They were able to know me better and understood the reason for my research as proposed (Guest et al, 2006). As a result, female research participants felt more comfortable and open with me.

At the end of each meeting, and in line with the ethics protocol of the University of Sheffield, all the participants were asked to send me their signed informed consent form which signified their agreement to participate in the focus groups (Phase One) and in the interviews (Phase Two) - see Appendix II, for participant consent forms. On the day before each focus group and interview session, the participants were contacted by email and they were given detailed information regarding the day and time of the focus group and interview session and were also provided with a link for the session. And on the day of each discussion, the participants were contacted again through a WhatsApp message to remind them about the time of the focus group and interview. More detailed information about the procedures of focus groups and interviews will be discussed in Sub-Sections 4.5.1.3. and 4.5.2.4.

4.5. Data Collection Methods

The data collection for this study involves two phases. In the first phase of the study, eight focus groups, with four participants each, were conducted. The focus groups began in October 2020 and ended in February 2021. In the second phase of the study, I carried out 11 semi-

structured interviews using the method of scrolling back. The interviews were conducted from March to June 2021. The following sections will address each phase in detail.

4.5.1. Phase One: Focus Groups

4.5.1.1. Overview of Focus Groups

Krueger and Casey (2015) defined a focus group as a "carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 2). This method of data collection has been widely used in areas such as marketing, decision-making, product or programme development, and it has recently been rediscovered by social scientists (Acocella, 2012; Franz, 2011).

What makes focus groups unique as a research method is that, first, they enable participants to engage in discussions interactively and naturally, as well as provide them opportunities to build on each other's thoughts (Davis et al, 2013; Kota et al, 2014). They also provide a voice to groups that may be marginalised (Tracy, 2019). In this particular study which aims to understand Saudi women's thoughts on digital campaigning on PA and sports in a maledominated society, focus groups would give women the opportunity to speak their minds and voice out their thoughts and feelings about the topic under investigation. Most importantly, focus groups are practically useful at an early stage of research as it can elicit general viewpoints that could be used to inform other stages of the research (Smithson, 2008).

However, as with any other research method, focus groups have some limitations. Acocella (2012) argued that the presence of other people may lead participants to express more socially desirable and stereotypical opinions to avoid judgement. Considering the said point, I conducted individual interviews using the method of scroll-back in the second phase of the data collection (Phase Two). Furthermore, a focus group is not as in-depth as other methods

of data collection, e.g., one-to-one interviews. There can be reluctance for some participants to express their thoughts or share personal stories in the presence of others, particularly when the research has the potential to touch on sensitive issues such as body image and health (Jayasekara, 2012). Another important issue is the potential of focus groups to be dominated by one or a small number of participants which may suppress group interaction and the emerging views of others (Happell, 2007). Considering such issues, researchers are advised to organise small group discussions, each one composed of homogeneous participants in order to avoid the generation of power issues and to provide an environment that promotes the comfort of participants (Jayasekara, 2012).

For the above reasons, I selected focus groups as an initial step for this study. Conducting focus groups helped to generate a wealth of information that was used for directing the focus of individual interview questions in Phase Two. Moreover, as focus groups are the most appropriate method for generating insights, opinions, feedback and suggestions from group interaction (Jayasekara, 2012), the objective of this project was to learn about Saudi women's general ideas and opinions about the topic under investigation. Furthermore, conducting focus groups first helped the researcher to identify participants who have exposure to some forms of digital campaigning around PA and sports and invite them for follow up interviews using the method of scroll-back (Phase Two) for a more in-depth discussion on their personal experiences of social media use and of digital campaigning around PA and sports. Finally, I used focus groups specifically to gather information about Saudi women's understandings and experiences of PA, sports, and of the challenges to engage with them (RQ 1) and of relevant digital campaigning (RQ 2).

4.5.1.2. Group Composition, Group Size and Number of Groups

One of the common approaches for deciding on focus group composition is to organise each focus group based on homogeneity (Morgan, 2019). Homogeneity, or similar characteristics, encourages participation and discussion, and helps reduce the number of focus groups a researcher has to carry out (Calandro, 2011). Grønkjær et al (2011) claimed that at least some "homogeneity in focus group construction is considered essential for group interaction and dynamics" (p. 23). For instance, participants who belong to the same age group might have similar frames of reference and feel comfortable sharing their thoughts with people who have been through the same experiences. In the same vein, Sim (1998) stated that "the more homogenous the membership of the group, in terms of social background, level of education, knowledge, and experience, the more confident individual group members are likely to be in voicing their [own] views" (p. 348). Morgan (1997) stated that homogeneity does not only allow for more free-flowing conversations amid participants within groups, but it facilitates analyses that examine differences in perspective between groups.

Determining group size is an issue in all forms of qualitative research, and focus groups are no exception (Morgan, 2019). Jayasekara (2012) noted that despite the various suggestions for the best participant numbers, it is important that the group size must be large enough to create discussion but not too large, which could prevent some participants from sharing their views within the available time. Likewise, Lune and Berg (2017) argued that large groups are not easy to manage, can become unwieldy and fragment into subgroups, thereby complicating control and understanding of the information provided by group participants. There is also an issue with transcribers, in particular their ability to properly associate a given speaker with his/her comments which would be easier with a smaller number of participants

in each group (Lune and Berg, 2017). Thus, most scholars recommended that a focus group should include between 4 and 12 participants (Krueger and Carey, 2015; Carey, 1994; Jayasekara, 2012).

Another important consideration is the number of focus groups to be conducted. The optimal number of focus groups depends on the nature and complexity of the topic under investigation (Jayasekara, 2012). Most researchers are in favour of the use of 4 to 6 focus groups to produce adequate data. This range is justified as the data become saturated and additional focus groups become unnecessary (Jayasekara, 2012). Following these, I carried out a focus group pilot (see Sub-Section 4.5.1.3. for further discussions about focus group pilot study), categorising my participants according to two criteria-membership of a university sports association and year of study as factors of homogeneity to ensure a degree of commonality among participants. The broader rationale for this sampling strategy was to recruit women who were members of university sports associations and others who were not members of university sports associations and at different stages of their studies; I felt this set of women would give me the best chance to gather a range of views. Thus, the aim was to sample for diversity.

The pilot study helped me realise that forming small groups would be more manageable, so I decided to conduct eight focus group discussions with four participants each (see Table 1).

Appendix I provides a list of focus group participants.

| | Early Study Years | Final Study Years |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| Member of University Sports Association | 2 | 2 |
| Not Member of University Sports Association | 2 | 2 |

4.5.1.3. The Procedure of Focus Groups

As mentioned above, I conducted a pilot study to assess the feasibility of conducting a larger one (Connelly, 2008; Van Teijlingen et al, 2001) and help shape the question structure (Breen, 2006). Thus, the participants involved in the pilot study were three female university students (1 Master and 2 PhD) studying at Sheffield University in Britain. This pilot was beneficial for this study for several reasons. First, it helped me assess the size of the focus groups. Second, I conducted the pilot study online via a social media platform known as Zoom. This was because of the COVID-19 global health crisis which prevented face-to-face interactions with participants. This online pilot study proved that it is practicable to continue online discussions and did not cause any issues. Finally, the pilot was also beneficial in terms of helping me prepare the actual study, particularly because it provided me with the appropriate direction for revising the focus group questions. Consequently, after evaluating the pilot study, I realised that there were some questions that were either ambiguous and might cause confusion to the participants or were repetitive; the participants had already answered them in different ways at other points during the discussions so that it was appropriate to avoid such questions when designing the actual study.

In the actual preparation stage of the study, interested participants were provided with the focus group information sheet online-see Appendix III, for the participant information sheet. They were asked to choose the online platforms of their preference for a brief meeting with them in order to fully explain the focus group's goals, the procedures that would be followed as well as to give them the opportunity to ask questions. They were also asked to choose the best timing and their preferred online platforms for the focus group discussions. They all

chose the online platform Zoom due to familiarity as they use it in their studies at the university.

Eight focus group discussions were conducted with four participants each, leading to a total of 32 participants. All the discussions were conducted through the online platform Zoom. Because my participants were familiar with Zoom, I did not face any problems conducting the focus group discussions. All that was required from the participants was for them to click the link sent to their email accounts. All the participants were on time and only one was late for the focus groups. All the participants were present until the end of the focus groups except for one who incidentally had a hospital appointment on the day of the focus group. On average, the focus groups discussions lasted around 90 minutes, but on occasions extended until 120 minutes. This included informing the participants about the topic and their rights in the project, answering questions, as well as showing them examples of digital campaigning around PA and sports (more details of these examples will be provided below). All the discussions were conducted in Arabic, audio recorded and then transcribed and translated in English.

The focus group discussions primarily concerned the following matters: (1) the understanding and experiences of PA and sports and (2) the understanding of digital campaigning on PA and sports targeting women in Saudi Arabia. During the discussions, the participants were shown examples of digital campaigning around PA and sports. Using these examples as prompts helped to generate further discussions about the participants' understanding of the topics. In the first example, the participants were provided with some photos and videos of social media movements/campaigns (of these movements/campaigns, governmental campaigns e.g., #Start Now and grassroot campaigns e.g., #An Hour for Yourself) that are happening on social

media platforms, Instagram in particular, and in the second example, the participants were provided with some workout videos and fitness posts that have been taken from athletes/influencers/activists' social media accounts. A discussion guide-see Appendix IV-was planned in advance in order to shape the conversation. According to Tracy (2019), creating a discussion guide is valuable as it helps the researcher to address topics naturally as they arise during the focus group discussion. Although there was a topic guide, I gave my participants the opportunity to lead the discussion during the focus groups and encouraged them to speak about their experiences of issues related to PA and sports and of digital campaigning on PA and sports. This was intended to guide rather than control which stories the participants wanted to speak about.

4.5.2. Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews with the Scroll-Back Method

4.5.2.1. Overview of Semi-Structured Interviews

This study employed semi-structured interviews with female university students to explore their personal experiences related to their social media use and familiarity with digital campaigning around PA and sports. In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are the most used interviewing methods and are generally organised around a set of open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are mainly used when the researcher is interested in capturing detailed information about a person's thoughts, motivations, and behaviour, or wants to explore new issues in depth (Boyce and Neale, 2006). Additionally, they allow participants to express themselves and talk about their experiences using their own words rather than numeric data (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

Given that this study sought to understand individuals' personal experiences related to their social media use and familiarity with digital campaigning around PA and sports, the semi-structured interview was useful for exploring these topics in detail. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews specifically to cast light on how and why Saudi women use social media and understand the role of social media influencers, celebrities, and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes (RQ3).

However, while semi-structured interviews can provide the researchers with a unique insight into Saudi women's personal experiences of the situation under investigation, it is important to keep in mind that data collected by interviews is individualistic and often subjective, and not representative of the general population (Rowley, 2012). However, I believe that these subjective thoughts are key to thoroughly understanding the participants' experiences of social media and of digital campaigning around PA and sports, particularly since these experiences are highly influenced by social media.

4.5.2.2. Participants of the Semi-Structured Interviews

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 female university students. The participants were first interviewed in Phase One of the study, during the focus groups and they were invited again for follow-up interviews, using scroll-back method (Phase Two) on their personal experiences of social media and of digital campaigning around PA and sports, and how this in turn contributes to their understanding of gender norms. The participants I interviewed at this stage were those who said during the focus group discussions that they had some experiences/exposure to social media campaigning around PA and sports in their own social media use. The objective was to interview 20 participants. However, as Ritchie et al (2014) recommended, qualitative methods yield a large amount of data that requires a

large period of time for transcribing, translating, and in-depth analysis, therefore, the sample size does not need to be large. For this study, the sample size for the interview is deemed to be adequate. Appendix I provides a list of interview participants.

4.5.2.3. Social Media Scroll-Back Method

4.5.2.3.1. Scrolling Back

In order to achieve insight into the participants' use of social media and familiarity with digital campaigning in relation to PA and sports on these platforms, the participants were asked during the interviews to go to and scroll through their social media accounts. They then showed their accounts to me and we discussed their personal experiences related to the topics. The social media scroll-back method is a qualitative research technique where a researcher and participant "scroll back" through the social media history of the participant. This method can be applied to different social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat (Robards and Lincoln, 2019). As an approach, it enables participants to be engaged in the research process as co-analysts, in order to make sense of their own social media experiences (Robards and Lincoln, 2017). Drawing participants into the process of analysing their own digital experiences helps researchers to understand their digital experiences on social media. Without engaging participants to provide contexts about their social media practices, the meaning of their own experiences could be absent and obscure (Robards and Lincoln, 2017). Moreover, the scroll-back method enables participants to narrate their own experiences on social media (Robards and Lincoln, 2017). Niland et al (2014) noted that today's young generation performs their social lives within social media, and thus, it is likely to be effective to go along with them into their world. The method implies that the environment-in this case, social media accounts-acts as a prompt to the discussion, without the researcher depending on photos and objects that are brought into the interview room (Jones et al, 2008).

4.5.2.3.2. Instagram

In terms of social media platforms, Instagram was chosen by the participants (more details about the reasons of such choice by the participants will be provided below) for the scroll back method. Instagram is a social media platform known for its user-generated content, where online users produce the content themselves (Fatanti and Suyadnya, 2015). Instagram provides features for sharing images, status updates and check-ins, retweets, sending direct messages, liking an image (Fatanti and Suyadnya, 2015), and, most recently, in 2016, applying face filters to selfies. Since its launch in 2010, it has become one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide (Boy and Uitermark, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, for example, the numbers of active users in 2022 are around 28 million, which is about 97% of the total population (Global Media Insight, 2022).

4.5.2.4. The Procedure of Semi-Structured Interviews with Scroll-Back Method

An interview pilot study was conducted to further improve the research design (Connelly, 2008; Van Teijlingen et al, 2001). I conducted the pilot study with a female university student (PhD), studying at Edinburgh University. The pilot study was conducted online through the online platform Zoom and as previously mentioned, this was because of the COVID-19 global health crisis. Conducting a pilot study was of great advantage for this study. First, it helped me to modify the interview questions (see Appendix IV) and prepare them for the actual study. Second and most importantly, the pilot study was beneficial in avoiding technical issues

related to the participants' registration to their social media accounts, in particular Instagram via Zoom during the scroll-back.

During the preparation stage of the study, interested participants were provided with the interview information sheet online-see Appendix III, for the participant information sheet. They were asked to choose the online platforms they preferred for a brief meeting for me to fully explain the interview's aim, and the procedures that would be followed and to give them the chance to ask questions. In line with my own experience of conducting the interview pilot study, these online meetings were also designed to show the participants how to register online and use the scroll-back during the interviews. The participants have been told that for the scroll-back aspect of the research, they needed to share their screen on the Zoom platform with me so that both of us were easily able to look through their social media content and activities together. The participants were also asked to choose the most convenient schedule and they also agreed to use the online platform Zoom because they use it with their studies at the university. I also asked the participants to choose what social media accounts (their favourite and most used accounts) for the scroll-back method. All the 11 participants chose Instagram. The reason for such a decision is that they follow many social media influencers/athletes/activists, particularly on this platform. And also, it would be easier for them to find fitness posts/workout videos that were posted by social media influencers/activists/athletes on Instagram.

It is worth noting here that the decision to conduct the interviews online was due to the nature of scroll-back method, in which the researcher and participant are required to sit alongside each other in the process of scroll-back; this appeared to be not feasible due to the global health crisis related to COVID-19 in which safety measures were required, e.g., physical

distancing. Because my participants were familiar with Zoom, I did not face any problems conducting the interviews. All that was required from the participants was for them to click the link that I provided to through email. All the participants were on time and only one was late for the interviews. All the participants were present until the end of the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. This included informing the participants about the topic and their rights in the project and answering any questions, as well as seeing some of the participants' social media activities. All the interviews were conducted in Arabic, audio recorded, and then transcribed and translated into English.

The interviews mainly focused on the following topics: (1) their personal experiences of social media, and (2) their understanding of the role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes. The interviews began with initial questions related to the most used social media accounts, the average time spent daily on these platforms, as well as the most common reasons for using them. These questions were relatively straightforward, prompting some basic recall and storytelling, which helped to break the ice with participants and helped to build rapport with them (Robards and Lincoln, 2019).

After some initial questions related to the aforementioned practices, the interviews then proceeded to the scroll-back element. In this study, the participants used their own devices-usually their laptops-to access their Instagram accounts. The participants were asked-while we were together online-to scroll-back through their own profiles to find fitness posts/workout videos that were posted by social media influencers/activists/athletes to narrate to the researcher their own personal experiences about them. Some participants invited me to see what they were scrolling through, while other participants scrolled by

themselves. The latter, when they found a workout post/video, they showed it to me, and we used that post/video as a prompt for discussion. In this way, I firmly placed my participants in control when it came to leading the discussion of their experiences of social media and their familiarity with digital campaigning in relation to PA and sports; this in return disrupted the hierarchy between the researcher and participant in the interview settings (Jayasekara, 2012; Happell, 2007).

4.6. Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure began from fieldwork. During fieldwork, a personal diary was used to take detailed notes of my reflections immediately after carrying out each focus group and interview discussion. This turned out to be useful, as I was able to avoid negative diversions as well as to concentrate on the theoretical framework of my study. It also helped to improve the credibility and quality of the data obtained during the fieldwork since I drew great attention to themes that emerged as a result of the interaction with the participants but not specifically covered in the focus group and interview questions. All of these helped to bring the most out of my fieldwork experiences and my focus groups and interviews.

After the fieldwork was completed, the process of transcription of the recorded focus groups and interviews was conducted as the second step in the analysis of the data. In this step, I listened, usually several times, very carefully to every word in the focus groups and interviews. During this process, I wrote short phrases in margins, particularly when something interesting was said about my personal reflections or themes that were repeatedly observed in the focus groups and interviews. Although there are a number of computer software programmes available for data analysis such as NVIVO-and I as a researcher have good

experience of using them-I adopted a manual analysis and the reason for such a decision was because I wanted to personally engage with the data.

Since qualitative analysis has the potential to involve personal biases i.e., one's own personal assumptions, previous knowledge and experiences, the researchers must approach the process of analysing their data with caution in which they need to distance themselves from what they know and be open to the data as it is uncovered (Wei and Dai, 2019). However, it is of very great advantage for the current research that it was supervised by two supervisors who come from different cultural backgrounds-Italian and British. During data analysis, I regularly engaged in discussions with them and this, in return, helped to draw my attention to important issues which I either did not recognise or did not adequately address. This in my view, was essential to the process of reflexivity because this helped to uncover hidden meanings, which contributed to further interpretations and reflections on the current study which undoubtedly enhanced the findings of the research.

In order to analyse qualitative data in this project (focus groups and interviews), thematic analysis (TA) was adopted to provide a rich analysis of female university students' understandings of digital campaigning around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. TA is one of the predominant methods of analysis in qualitative research (Christofi et al, 2009). TA "is mainly described as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). TA was an applicable method for this project for multiple reasons. It is a highly flexible research technique that can be modified for the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed, but complex, record of data (Vaismoradi et al, 2013; Nowell et al, 2017). TA is also an advantageous tool for examining the viewpoints of different

research participants, emphasising similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Nowell et al, 2017).

In this research, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. This framework, one of the widely used techniques in social science research, offers a clear step-by-step guide to undertaking TA. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six phases in conducting TA: (1) familiarising yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing these themes, (5) defining and naming these themes and (6) producing the report (p. 87-93).

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework has proved to be useful as through such a framework, I have identified, analysed and generated related themes. As such, the empirical part of this research is presented across three chapters (Chapter Five, Six and Seven). In Chapter Five, I discuss the participants' understandings and experiences of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. Chapter Six discusses the participants' understandings of digital campaigning targeting women around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the participants' personal experiences of social media use as well as their understanding of the role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes.

4.7. Research Ethics

There are several ethical challenges that researchers may face in conducting a qualitative study. These ethical concerns include informed consent, confidentiality and whether the study has any potential to cause harm to research participants (Greene, 2014; Bell, 2005). Therefore, this research strives to fulfil the highest commitment to ethical principles by considering these key ethical issues.

The Code of Practice for Research Ethics at the University of Sheffield provides a guideline related to the ethical considerations through which both staff and students, who engage with research involving human participants, are encouraged to consider. Any research that involves human participants requires approval from the University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee. Accordingly, this project received ethics approval from both the University of Sheffield in the UK and King Abdul-Aziz University-my scholarship sponsor in Saudi Arabia.

As suggested by Miller and Bell (2012) "access clearly needs to be renegotiated prior to each interview" (p. 69). Thus, I obtained written consent from the participants who agreed to participate in the focus groups (Phase One) as well as from those who were invited again for follow-up interviews (Phase Two). While I had written consent from the participants in the focus groups and interviews, during the second phase of the data collection, I conducted semi-structured interviews incorporating the method of scroll-back. During the interviews, the participants were asked to log into their social media accounts through whatever devices they had and scroll through their feeds. The method of scroll-back focuses on personal archives produced through everyday interactions on social media that are managed by an individual but co-constituted by a networked public of people through comments, tags and uploads (Robards and Lincoln, 2019). The nature of these archives requires careful thinking about the ethical issues of using this type of data, which is not intended for research purposes. Therefore, in order to minimise such risk in the current study, I did not collect digital data from participants' profiles even if they mention it themselves during the process of scrollingback (e.g., names of people). I concentrated solely on what the participants said. Participants' social media accounts, other social media users, and individuals mentioned in the posts in the participants' accounts were not disclosed. The participants were informed in the information sheet and verbally prior to each interview about the scroll-back method. They were also informed that it was their decision to share with me or not whatever content they wished on their social media accounts. Also, I informed the participants that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study without giving any reasons. If they chose to do so, their data would be destroyed and not used in the study.

Furthermore, in order to achieve the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and of their data, a number of measures were adopted. First, at the start of the focus groups, the participants were asked to maintain the confidentiality of all discussions that were taking place. In this case, the participants were asked to agree verbally not to disclose the content of the focus group and not to mention to anyone else the names of those involved in the group with them. Also, the participants were given assurance that their real names would not be used in this study. This was achieved by asking them to choose their own pseudonym before starting the focus group and interview sessions. The participants were informed that these pseudonyms must be chosen randomly. I also stated that pseudonyms would be used in publications and other research outputs, and the participants will not be identified in any reports or publications that arise from this project. My participants were also informed that the focus group and interview transcripts would be anonymised, pseudonymised and any identifiable personal data removed. I also informed them that the researcher would collect personal data whenever necessary and when gathering personally identifiable information, the researcher would make sure that the participants were informed about this. Furthermore, I also stated that both focus groups and interviews would be audio recorded-only; therefore, I used my own password protected and encrypted voice recorder for the recording. Also, I informed them that all focus group and interview recordings would be used only for analysis and nothing else without their written permission. Additionally, they were informed that their

data (whether focus group, interview recordings, transcripts, and consent forms) would be stored onto my University of Sheffield Google Drive space where they would be kept password-protected and would only be accessed by the researcher. They were also informed that their data will be kept for 10 years and after that, it will be destroyed.

Regarding the position of the researcher, there were a number of ethical issues concerning being an insider researcher. Foremost is my own bias, referring to my own knowledge of the culture of Saudi Arabia which might restrict my understanding of the interviews and interactions at any stage during the research project (Greene, 2014). Thus, in order to avoid any potentially biased elements, I as the researcher positioned myself as an outsider, distancing myself from what I knew about the culture of Saudi Arabia and encouraged my participants to explain what they meant by their words. This position helped me and gave me the chance to perceive the data of each participant's cultural attitudes in a more objective way. It was likewise valuable to avoid imposing subjective cultural knowledge which could create bias or misinterpret pieces of the data.

As stated previously, the researcher works as a lecturer at King Abdul-Aziz University where this study was conducted which could raise issues regarding my role. For instance, it was essential to consider the power balance between myself as the researcher and the potential participants. However, King Abdul-Aziz University has two main campuses, one campus in Jeddah (where I recruited my participants) and another campus in Rabigh (where I work as a lecturer). By recruiting from the Jeddah campus, I was able to avoid any conflict of interest from the use of students whom I may be teaching. Thus, there was not any inappropriate relationship at any stage of this study.

Another consideration is related to the idea that because insider researchers may have access to confidential information about the population under investigation, this has the potential to negatively affect relationships (Greene, 2014). As such, the participants may feel hesitant to share their experiences and opinions due to the researcher's role in the study and in case their experiences and opinions may be exposed to other members of the university. However, as Karnieli-Miller et al (2009) argued "the quantity and quality of the data shared with the researcher depend in part on the relationship that develops between the researcher and various participants" (p. 282). Therefore, in this study, the researcher strived to establish a sympathetic and considerate relationship with the participants to help towards building trust and elicit participants' experiences. Additionally, because insider researchers may understand the cultural context better than outsider researchers, they could gain participant's confidence and may become welcome by participants who are happy to talk to someone who understands them (Greene, 2014; Bell, 2005).

Finally, it was recognised that this research had the potential to touch on sensitive issues such as body image and health. Also, the method of scroll-back is not always convenient for the participants who might encounter some content that may provoke embarrassment or shame, all of which could potentially cause concerns for the participants. Thus, safety measures were adopted to decrease any potential ethical risks. These measures included effective listening, taking a break whenever necessary during the focus group and interview discussions, turning off the audio-recorder when the participants wished to do so and also providing the participants with contact numbers of support services in Saudi Arabia in case someone asked for help. Additionally, the participants were informed in the information sheet and verbally prior to each interview about the scroll-back method. My participants were also informed that it was ultimately their decision to share or not with me whatever content they had on

their social media accounts. Moreover, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, they could withdraw from the study without giving any reasons, and they also could refuse to answer questions that they did not wish to answer. I also designed research questions in an open-ended manner, to give my participants the freedom to share what they wanted.

4.8. Concluding Summary

This chapter has outlined the data collection methods utilised in this study. The qualitative research approach was chosen and focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used as the main tools for the collection of data. The focus groups were employed in the first step of collecting data to elicit general viewpoints that could be used to inform other stages of the research, in this case, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were chosen to collect personal data from 11 participants purposively selected. The data was manually analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Ethical considerations in relation to participant consent forms, confidentiality, anonymity and whether there could be harm to research participants have been addressed.

The following chapter discusses the first set of empirical findings, concerning Saudi women's understandings and experiences of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 5. Women's Understandings and Experiences of Physical Activity and Sports in Saudi Arabia

5.1. Introduction

A large body of scientific evidence has established the role of PA and sports in health and well-being, but despite this, the levels of PA and sports among Muslim girls and women remain low (Sharara et al, 2018). Within the sociology of health and PE, and sporting literature, a few studies have focused on Muslim women to further our understanding of the barriers they encounter within PA and sports (e.g., Jiwani and Rail, 2010; Sfeir, 1985; De Knop et al, 1996; Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Walseth, 2006; Khan et al, 2012; Walseth, 2015). Early research suggested cultural and religious traditions, as well as structural limitations among these barriers (Knez et al, 2012; Jiwani and Rail, 2010). However, it would be misleading to assume that these factors are definitive and experienced by all Muslim girls and women (Knez et al, 2012).

In recent years, PE and PA studies have begun to consider individual experiences as opposed to those of groups. By focusing on individual experiences, importance is given to discourses, in particular to how these are embodied by individuals in different ways, resulting in multiple and fluid identities (Stride, 2016). This theoretical shift moves away from exploring structural oppression and inequalities to recognising the agency of women and girls in constructing their identities and navigating power relations (Stride, 2016).

However, this can also draw attention away from group experiences that underscore the enduring nature of discrimination (Stride, 2016). This study acknowledges individual narratives, but it also remains conscious of broader structural and cultural influences in its

analysis. This chapter aims to explore Saudi women's understandings and experiences of PA and sports. It will explore how ideas of place, Islam, traditions and society's beliefs, family influence and structural issues influence their approach to PA and sports.

It is worth noting here that this chapter is mainly drawing on the analysis of focus group data, but it also includes observations deriving from the interviews. As detailed in Chapter Four, my sample included women at different stages of their studies, with half of them being members of university sports associations. As part of the analysis, I systematically looked at whether university level and membership in sports associations seemed to shape women's responses, but these factors turned out to be not relevant for the analysis.

In the first part of the chapter, I will discuss Saudi women's understandings of PA, sports and place in the context of public and private spaces. I will then discuss the kinds of sports activities that Saudi young women feel able to perform in what they see as public spaces. I will conclude by presenting data on their attitudes towards taking up outdoor activities in mixed-gender events. In the second part of the chapter, I will shed light on the factors that seem to shape women's experiences of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. I will begin by exploring the influence of religion, traditions and societal beliefs on women's decisions; the role of the family; and the effects of practical issues such as sporting facilities and membership fees, and government support on women's attitudes towards PA and sports.

5.2. Physical Activity, Sports and Place

5.2.1. Public and Private Spaces

Based on what the young participants shared in the focus groups, it seems that for Saudi young women participation in sports and PA is commonly associated with particular places.

The focus groups' participants made a clear distinction between what they mean by private and public spaces. Private spaces refer to any space either occupied only by members of the women's immediate family (such as the home) or which is sex-segregated (such as women's only gyms, schools or universities). Places outside the family home, i.e., the street and urban localities, are viewed as public spaces. The distinctions between private and public spaces have an important role and impact on the decision to participate in sports and PA.

The young women generally agreed PA and sports should be primarily carried out in private places. When I asked Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association, about her interest in joining outdoor activities, her answer showed that she did not like the idea:

I am not one of the people who are attracted to a public marathon. If I want to practise my sport, it will be at my home and at a time suitable for me. I have a lot of sports equipment at home...Outdoor sports, in a public place, I do not like to go, I do not prefer to join them (Rima).

Rima's narrative suggests that she is a woman who likes the idea of practising her sports in private spaces. Her home provides Rima with a comfortable space for sports activities and according to the time that suits her. By choosing her home as the only desirable place to practise sports, Rima can avoid issues that are associated with practising sports outside, particularly in sports and leisure facilities. This aligns with Kilgour and Parker's (2013) work, where they contend that PA can be viewed as something that people can fit around their daily routine and time, and this helps to eradicate the financial and often highly scheduled constraints of gym and leisure facilities.

For other participants, the appreciation of practising sports in private spaces, such as womenonly gyms, is important because these places allow them to have an element of control over who else will be present during their exercise, as seen from Sarah 's, 24, not a member of a university sports association, story:

...I don't feel that public places are suitable for me. The gym is better. In the gym you find a closed place and there is also an open place, a large open yard.

There, I take my rest better and I do not attract people's attention, especially men's. This is very important to me (Sarah).

Sarah is another young woman who disliked the idea of practising sports in public. Sarah identified women-only gyms as her preferred places as these have both covered and open areas where she can practise her sports away from the gaze of men.

Dalia, 21, a member of a university sports association, in her understanding of public spaces, described them as places where she could walk in the street and smell clean air and communicate with people:

...Sports are not only good for practising, but it also means that you can walk on the street and smell clean air and communicate with the trainer face-to-face. You socialise and see people who practise the sport with you. It is a behaviour that I perform in a certain way, but here in Saudi Arabia, anything related to women that we want to offer our opinion about – will be rejected (Dalia).

Dalia valued street space as a place for enjoyment and belonging and found it a form of social activity that encourages relationships with other people (Azzarito and Hill, 2013). But for her,

and other women in this study, the street remained an inaccessible space for exercise. The societal beliefs surrounding women's sports is the reason as Dalia considered Saudi society to be against the idea of women participating in sports. I will address this point in greater detail later in the second half of this chapter (Section 5.2.).

The results reflected how women understood the context of public and private spaces. Spaces that are either occupied by family members, such as homes, or those that are sex-segregated such as women-only gyms, schools or universities were considered to be private. Those outside the family home and non-sex-segregated, i.e., street and urban localities, were viewed as public. The participants generally agreed that engaging in PA and sports should be done mainly in private because this allows them to have control over time, the cost of fitness equipment, and who will be present during their exercise or sports activities.

As discussed above, the participants were more inclined to the idea of practising sports in private spaces, rather than in public spaces, therefore it is worth exploring next which sporting activities these young women were able to perform in public spaces and the reasons that make them choose these particular types of activities.

5.2.2. Physical Activity, Sports and Public Spaces

Among the participants⁸, many considered walking to be more acceptable than other PA or sports activities in public. Sarah, 24, not a member of a university sports association, considered walking as the most suitable sporting activity for women to undertake in public places, attributing the reason to Islam. Sarah discussed how Islam encourages men, but not

⁸Participants include women who identified as participants in a university sports association and those who did not, as well as those who are in their early years of study and those who are in their final years of study. See Chapter Four for more on this.

women, to run in public places, for example, between Al-Safa and Al-Marwa⁹ when they do Umrah [Umrah is an Islamic Pilgrimage to Makkah Al-Mukarramah], as stated:

I see that walking is normal and appropriate...but running is not acceptable. When we go to Umrah, religion allocates an area for men to run but not for women. So walking is better (Sarah).

Areej, 22, not a member of a university sports association, offered further clarification on this issue:

We follow the teachings of the Islamic religion. Islam shows that a woman must be covered, whether by an abaya or a long jacket. When a woman goes out in the street for sport, like running or soccer, it is considered inappropriate because they could not wear modest clothes and adhere to the Islamic dress (Areej).

Areej's statement shows that there is a correspondence between walking and Islamic principles-she can walk while she is wearing clothes that are perfectly in accord with the Islamic rules, but if she chooses to practise running, finding appropriate clothes that meet Islamic requirements for modesty is a problem.

Amira, 21, a member of a university sports association, further clarified the acceptance of walking in public, linking her argument to the idea that Saudi society is accustomed to seeing many Saudi women walking daily:

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⁹Al-Safa and Al-Marwa are two small hills, connected to the larger Abu Qubais and Qaiqan mountains, respectively, in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Saudi Arabia.

Walking is a normal thing that women do, unlike running or resistance training which people are not used to seeing women do in public places. Walking does not attract people's attention (Amira).

When Saudi young women choose to practise sports, they are subjected to a range of sanctions from members of their community, especially men. These sanctions are diverse, ranging from being harassed with words or deeds to direct physical harassment, as Sarah, 25, a member of a university sports association, noted:

Walking is considered normal behaviour and natural. If a girl was running, people would look at her and prevent her from doing so. They will annoy her in words and deeds. When I run, they say words that bother me, so I do not like running in public (Sarah).

However, if a non-Saudi woman is the one running, the behaviour toward her will be different.

This idea was expressed well in the interview data when the participants were talking about Saudi and non-Saudi influencers:

There are people in our society, especially young males, who are afraid of the influence of Saudi influencers on Saudi women. They are afraid of their effect on their daughters, sisters, or wives. They think that their daughters and sisters will imitate the Saudi influencer and will become like her and go running in public. Then Saudi women will become equal to Saudi men, and they will feel that a Saudi girl will live the same life as a man, and this will bother them because men think that women are less important (Amjad).

Amjad, 21, a member of a university sports association, stated that Saudi men are afraid of the influence of Saudi women on the women members of their families due to its possible impact of the women becoming equal to men.

As the excerpts from the women's stories illustrate, multiple discourses influence young women's decisions on which sporting activities they can perform in public. Discourses related to religion and societal beliefs create challenges when these women decide which sporting activities to undertake in public places. I will address this point in more detail later in the second half of this chapter (Section 5.2.).

However, the participant's narratives also reflect that their decisions are not totally defined by these discourses. They exercise their agency in ways that enable them to counter these (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Ali et al, 2020). Some women in this study showed their willingness to practise other sporting activities alongside walking in public places. Ohoud, 23, member of a university sports association, is one of the women who does not see a contradiction between practising sports such as riding a bike and adhering to the teachings of the Islamic religion. Ohoud noted that when a woman rides a bike, she will do so in clothes that will meet the religious requirements of modesty, as she explained:

It is appropriate to do sport such as riding a bike in public and as I see that this is a normal thing and there is no problem in it, especially if the woman is dressed modestly, and in a way that is compatible with the teachings of the Islamic religion (Ohoud).

Other participants, such as Glu, 19, not a member of a university sports association, and Serene, 23, a member of a university sports association, have mentioned that participation in

sports is a human right, and women have an equal right as men to practise sports in Saudi Arabia, whether in public or private:

I see it as appropriate because it is personal freedom, and every person, whether a man or a woman, should do what he or she wants and sees fit (Glu).

There are many people who say that women must stay in their homes, and they are not entitled to do their sport in public while men have the right to do anything, and it is normal that they run in public. I am against this, a woman is like a man, she has the right to do a sport, whether it is at home or in the club or in public. It is up to the woman (Serene).

Glu and Serene's thoughts are very interesting as they hold counter-cultural views when it comes to women's sports. One possible reason for this is their educational background. Both Glu and Serene come from social science backgrounds (Glu is studying Arts and Arts history, whereas Serene is studying economics), and people who study such courses might be more likely to counter the norms and be critical of things around them.

This demonstrates how the participants gave significance to walking as the most acceptable PA or sport activity in public spaces, attributing reasons to religion and societal beliefs. However, there were some women who showed their acceptance to practise other sport activities besides walking especially if they wear clothing that meets the religious requirement of modesty. Other participants considered the idea of practising sports in public as personal freedom and that women have the right to practise their sports anywhere.

As discussed, the participants reported how they appreciated the idea of practising sports in private spaces where there are no people, especially men. Gender segregation arises as a significant theme that needs to be explored in greater detail in the following subsection.

5.2.3. Physical Activity, Sports and Gender Segregation

Across categories of participants, many women recognised the need to be segregated from men when they take up their sports and this was often attributed to religious beliefs:

I do not prefer the idea of mixing... When returning to religion, this is considered wrong, and we have limits. If I am going to sit in a public place and exercise, I can choose not to mix (Rima).

Like some of the participants in studies by Walseth and Fasting (2003); Pfister (2010), Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association, thought that the idea of practising sports with men is contrary to Islamic religion, so she does not like to practise in mixed-gender settings. Rima noted that her participation in sports is only acceptable if it takes place in settings where she will be entirely protected from the view of males.

Other participants, such as Areej, 22, not a member of a university sports association, also voiced rejection of the idea of practising sport in mixed-gender settings and, on this occasion, she pointed to societal beliefs that surround this practice as the main reason for her rejection of this idea. Areej noted that she did not like to practise sports with men because such behaviour is not acceptable within the Saudi Arabian culture:

...We will meet a group of society that rejects the idea of mixing of the sexes, they don't like the idea that both men and women exercise together, they refuse such a thing (Areej).

Some of the participants like Areej rejected practising sports in mixed-gender settings because they believe that such behaviour is not acceptable within the Saudi culture. Other women, such as Sarah, 24, not a member of a university sports association, do not like to join mixed-gender events, with activities such as running or cycling, as these involve some form of body reveal and will not cater to their need for privacy from men.

When women practise sports in the open air and in a public place in which women and men mix, I do not see that as a good idea. If I want to play sports, such as running or cycling, I want it in a closed place designated for women only and far from men. The only sport that women can do in a mixed-gender environment is walking, and other sports will require women to reveal some parts of their body. I don't like men to look at my body, this is not acceptable to me (Sarah).

In her example, Sarah recognises her need to do sports away from the male gaze due to her religious and cultural beliefs. To Sarah it is not acceptable in Islam to wear revealing clothes, especially if men are present. She is concerned that wearing revealing clothes will draw society's attention towards her which is something that she does not like.

Sarah's statement is quite similar to what emerged in Cortis's (2009) study, where some women from different cultural backgrounds (i.e., Muslim, Hindu, Christian and non-religious women) in Australia described how they felt less comfortable playing outdoor sporting activities, particularly netball and swimming as such activities would not ensure that they could dress modestly and be able to keep themselves away from the gaze of males.

For other young women in this study, their wish to be in a female-only environment is often due to their concerns of being harassed by men and also the possibility of being filmed in the street without their permission:

If only women were there, I would feel encouraged and go, but if the training venue was mixed, I would not like this idea. Like what the girls said, there may be harassment from men, and it is possible for the crowd to gather in the street, and it is also possible to have photography and I do not like this (Walaa).

Walaa, 22, a member of a university sports association, expressed in her narrative that she lacks enthusiasm about practising sports in a mixed-gender environment because she is afraid of being harassed by men and she also does not like the idea of having someone taking photos of her in the street. We could speculate that Walaa, like many women in Saudi Arabia, is afraid that her photos will be published in the newspapers or posted on social media websites without her permission. If this happened, it would cause harm to these young women and their families who do not want to see photos of their daughters in newspapers, let alone posted online. Also, if their photos circulated, they could be the victim of men blackmailing them over their photos in order to extort sexual favours or money from these women (Al-Saggaf and Islam, 2015; Al-Saggaf, 2016).

It is clear that discourses related to religion, society's beliefs, privacy and filming in the street create challenges for these young women to engage in outdoor activities at mixed-gender events. However, their stories also reveal that their decisions are not entirely dictated by these discourses.

Some women in this study did not agree with the idea that mixing of the sexes in sports would violate Islamic rules because they believe that if they practise sports, they will do so in a place where they will be physically distanced from men, wearing modest clothes and they will avoid drawing the attention of men towards them. Atheer, 20, a member of a university sports association, stated:

This is not a violation of religion because there is no intimacy between a man and a woman if they are exercising in public. Being alone with one another is forbidden in one of the texts from the Qur'an...Here I practise sports and will be modest and men are far from me, and I have not done anything contrary to religion. I have not put any make-up on, I did not try to draw men's attention, and I did not violate religion in anything (Atheer).

Joan, 21, not a member of a university sports association, is another participant who also showed positive attitudes towards practising sports in mixed-gender settings. Joan did not find practising sports in a mixed-gender environment a problem because she will do so in the company of her friends and other family members:

...The positive aspect is that if we were in a mixed marathon, I usually have no problem because I will be running with my girlfriend and my sister and children (Joan).

For other women, the idea of mixing the sexes in sports is particularly important as this will help change attitudes towards women and their sports.

I honestly do not oppose that there are mixed activities between the sexes...I am with it, I see it as very normal. This helps because a man accepts a woman's sport, seeing her practise sports as one of her rights (Serene).

For Serene, 23, a member of a university sports association, the idea of mixing the sexes in sports was acceptable and she did not mind joining such activities. Serene thought that practising sports in a mixed-gender environment will help change how men in a country such as Saudi Arabia think of women and their sports. Serene believed that men would see women as human beings who have similar rights in life. When women are perceived to have equal rights with men, the idea of women's participation in public then will be acceptable.

To conclude, taking part in mixed-gender, outdoor events, for some of the participants, would not be an option due to factors such as religion, society's beliefs and privacy and filming in the street. However, other women would not mind joining such events and they did not see that the mixing of the sexes in sporting events would violate Islamic rules because when they join such events, they will follow Islamic rules in terms of wearing modest clothes and avoiding drawing men's attention towards them. Other participants appreciated the idea of joining a mixed-gender event because they will do so in the company of their friends and relatives. While others found mixing the sexes in sports is highly important for Saudi women because this helps push the idea of women participating in sports to become more acceptable to Saudi men.

Factors such as religion and societal beliefs have played an important role in women's participation in PA and sports, thus these arise as significant themes that need to be expanded in greater detail in the following sections.

5.3. Factors that Shape Women's Experiences of Physical Activity and Sports in Saudi Arabia

5.3.1. The Role of Religion in the Decision to Participate in Physical Activity and Sports: Does Islam encourage sport participation?

With reference to the Koran and different hadiths¹⁰, the young women in the study stated that Islam is positive towards sports and PA, similar to what was found in studies by Kahan (2003); Walseth and Fasting (2003); Walseth (2015). The participants agreed that the reasons why Islam is in favour of sports and PA are primarily due to the fact that they bring health and recreational benefits.

Many of the women made references to the health concerns of Islam. Sheikha, 23, not a member of a university sports association, noted that Islam promotes good health, and a healthy lifestyle is encouraged in PA and sports:

We all know that Islam draws attention to things that strengthen the body and make it healthy and sound, and physical activity contributes to building the body in a sound structure (Sheikha).

The young women in the study made special references to two strong hadiths which demonstrate the significance of sports and PA. One of the hadiths that these women referred to is reported by Umar Ibn Khattab: "teach your children swimming and archery and tell them to jump on the horses" (Wabuyabo et al, 2015, P. 83). The young women also made reference to a hadith, mentioned earlier, which recounts the story of Aisha engaging in a race with

¹⁰The term hadith refers to any of the various collected accounts of the words, actions and habits of the Prophet Mohammad during his lifetime.

Prophet Muhammad. Interestingly, these two examples are important for Muslim women because, in the first example, the Prophet Muhammad does not distinguish between men and women when it comes to the participation in sports. On the contrary, he encourages both sexes to take up sports and PA. The second example shows explicitly that the Prophet Muhammad requested women to run.

From these, it is evident that a number of women believe that Islam supports the participation of women in PA. Due to the women's positive attitudes towards PA and sports, one might believe that they were all physically active, but the following results show that this is not the reality. In fact, the next section will explore the reasons why these Saudi women were not particularly involved in sports and PA.

How Different Interpretations of Islam Influence Women's Engagement with Sports

As discussed by Kay (2006); Ahmad (2011), the issues associated with women's participation in sports today are significantly intertwined with different interpretations of Islam. Based on what the participants shared in the focus groups, there is great diversity in how Saudi women interpret Islam and how this leads to different experiences in sports and PA. Some women looked at Islam in a secular way, where it played a minor role in their lives concerning sports. They were unconcerned about the religious significance of engaging in PA and sports, similar to the finding by Palmer (2009). Areej, 22, not a member of a university sports association, is an example of a woman who believed that the participation in PA and sports is a human right, and every individual must have the possibility to practise sports whether s/he has faith or not, as stated:

Religion is one thing and sport is a different thing. Sport is a human right. It is the right of anyone who follows religion or not, even if she or he is an atheist (Areej).

This research also revealed other interpretations of Islam-among my participants some reported adhering to what may be seen as more traditional interpretations and following much more closely the requirements of covering the body from the male view and avoiding mix-gender sports activities. These women noted Islam's advice for Muslim women to wear the hijab and avoid engaging in mixed-gender activities.

I do not see religion as an obstacle at all, but as a person, I should do my sport in a place where there is no mixing with men. I can practise my sport at home if this is comfortable for me, and if I want to go to walk or run outside the house, religion will not oppose me as long as I wear modest clothes and conform to the teachings of the Islamic religion (Serene).

Like the girls in Walseth's (2015) research, Serene, 23, a member of a university sports association, interpreted Islam in such a way that neither the hijab nor gender segregation raised any practical barrier to her sport participation as she adhered to requirements stemming from her identity as a Muslim female. However, other young participants in this study reported the opposite; they found that such requirements have negatively impacted on their ability to participate in PA and sports, similar to findings by Walseth and Fasting (2003); Pfister (2010). Ola, 23, a member of a university sports association, discussed how the use of the hijab has restricted her exercise and it is, according to her, almost impossible to practise sports wearing a hijab. The consequences are that this young woman has had to practise

physical activities in dedicated places for women where she feels comfortable when she practises PA, as she reflected:

I do not see that it [religion] facilitates the matter, in order to be able to exercise, it must be in a specific place for women in order to feel comfortable, especially that I am veiled. Religion requires me to be veiled, wear the abaya and be covered (Ola).

The transcripts of the focus groups also revealed other interpretations of Islam which seem to function as a barrier to some of the young participants in this study. These interpretations are particularly related to power relations within society, as Walaa, 22, and Lama, 23, members of a university sports association, reflected below:

Islam urges the practice of sport for both women and men, Islam stresses on the importance of taking care of the body and health, but I also see that the power of society is greater than the power of Islam in this regard. Islam demands modesty, but it did not prevent the woman from going to the club and practising sports. Society, in particular men, shows that the woman who goes to the club and plays sports is an abnormal woman. I see that the voice of society is louder than the voice of Islam (Walaa).

I agree that religion has encouraged sports, but society and the environment in which we live, do not allow sports. It is difficult to run in a walkway, as it is difficult to swim in the sea, society will never accept that (Lama).

Walaa and Lama's narratives demonstrate how Saudi young women may not see Islam as a religion against women's sports but see negative views as an issue rooted within Saudi

Arabian culture. These young women thought that Islam demands modesty, but it does not prevent women from going to the club or practising sports in public. However, going to the gym or playing sports in public is not regarded as appropriate behaviour for women in the culture of Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, Walaa and Lama's choices to identify more with Islam seem to work as a form of cultural disembedding¹¹. By splitting religion and culture, these young women are acquiring more individual space for action. This finding, that the strategy of separating religion from tradition has guaranteed them more individual space for action, is supported in the work of Walseth (2006); Eisenstadt and Giesen (1995), which has shown that there are differences between how religious and ethnic collective identities operate. In their studies, religious identities, rather than cultural identities, seem to give more space for action when it comes to the issue of gender. This appears peculiar but might be best explained by the fact that Islam as a religion is open to many individual interpretations, and Walaa and Lama choose a modern interpretation of Islam in which they view exercising and being physically active as very important for women because Islam encourages such behaviour. They also choose views on gender where there is equality between the sexes on the issue of sport participation.

In conclusion, the results show that different interpretations of Islam produce different barriers and opportunities. In this regard, for some of the participants, Islam plays a minor role in relation to sports, with participation in PA being entirely a human issue, and Islam having no influence on it. In fact, while issues related to the use of the hijab and gender segregation were reported by some of the young women as a primary barrier to practise PA

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¹¹In this paper, the concept of cultural disembedding is used to describe the general processes of 'liberation' from traditions and cultures as shown in Walseth's 2006 study.

and sports, other women rather pointed to wider power relations within Saudi society as an obstacle for them.

5.3.2. Traditions and Society's Beliefs as an Influence in Doing Physical Activity and Sports

5.3.2.1. Dress Code and Sporting Activities

While the abaya, a full-length dress Saudi women are required by society¹² to wear in public, promotes modesty by protecting the female body from view, it has a decisive influence on women's participation in sports. Many of the participants discussed how the abaya restricts their exercise, especially with activities that involve a lot of movement such as running or jumping, limiting them to those that require less movement, such as walking. According to Sarah, 20, a member of a university sports association:

The abaya is not useful for you to wear and go out and exercise, like running or jumping rope, because your movement will not be easy and comfortable (Sarah).

Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association, agreed:

We are in Saudi Arabia. The weather is very hot, and it does not help for a girl to go out and do a sport while wearing an abaya (Rima).

Sarah's narrative suggests the abaya is a hindrance to activities with vigorous movement. Rima expounds on this, noting how the traditional abaya is highly uncomfortable, especially in a country such as Saudi Arabia which is known for hot weather. Such experiences are not limited to these young women in this study, but also experienced by some Australian Muslim

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¹²It is worth noting that, until quite recently (2018), women were obliged by law to wear a head covering and black abaya, as well as to remain decent and respectful.

players as in Palmer's (2009) research who expressed frustration and resentment at having to exercise in clothes that restricted their movement and were oppressively hot.

For other participants, the role that the family plays in their opportunities for PA is more significant. I will address the role of the family in more detail later in this section. For example, Serene, 23, a member of a university sports association, demonstrates how her parents prevent her from wearing a sports abaya because they do not like it. This has limited her choice to the traditional abaya, which she finds uncomfortable:

The abaya is a hindrance when my family does not allow me to wear the sports abaya because they do not like it. The traditional abaya is heavy and long, and I do not feel comfortable in practising sports (Serene).

Some of the young women pointed to cultural beliefs, that Saudi society is not accustomed to the idea of a woman practising sport in public while she is wearing the abaya, and this was considered a primary barrier:

I have never seen the abaya as an obstacle. I wore an abaya when I was abroad and I did sports while wearing it. I felt that it was normal and society did not look at me in a strange way. But if I tried a sport in Saudi Arabia, people would look at me and see this as strange because they are not used to the idea of a woman practising sport in public while wearing an abaya (Amal).

This highlights how women's engagement in sports is shaped by the intersection of different positions. In the case of Amal, 21, not a member of a university sports association, the intersection of her gendered and cultural position is especially important (Walseth, 2006).

Whilst the women's narratives reflect the significance of multiple influences on their experiences of PA; discourses around PA, weather, family and culture create challenges for them to be physically active. Their stories also suggest they exercise their agency in challenging the influence of the abaya in various ways. For some of the women, Ranad, 21, a member of a university sports association, wearing the abaya while practising exercises is not a problem because they do not see the need to practise their sport in public places. However, they are more inclined to the idea of practising their sports in closed places where they do not have to use the abaya:

I do not see the abaya as an obstruction because I will not do resistance training or cardio exercises by the sea or in public. I only practise it at home or in the club so I do not need to wear an abaya. As for walking or cycling, I do not see the abaya as a hindrance because I do not need to make special movements or raise my legs (Ranad).

Another woman, Shumukh, 20, not a member of a university sports association, exercised their ability to navigate the influence of the abaya by using sports abayas. These provide them with an opportunity to practise different types of physical activities that still conform to Islamic rules:

The only sport that can be done with the abaya is just walking, but there are abayas that are similar to the traditional one urged by Islam, such as a sports abaya. If you want to practise different types of sports, you will have different types of abayas (Shumukh).

Shahrazad, 21, not a member of a university sports association, offered further clarification on this issue:

In Britain, I wear modest clothes such as long trousers and a headscarf, making it easier for me to practise sports than using an abaya in Saudi Arabia. The abaya does not represent the Islamic religion, if I wear modest clothing, such as long trousers and a headscarf that covers my head, that is enough (Shahrazad).

Shahrazad highlighted that the abaya does not represent the Islamic rules because there are other clothes which remain compatible with Islamic rules. By resisting the meanings associated with different forms of styles, in this case, "Saudi" and "Western", Shahrazad has been able to construct her sports identity in a way that has prevented her from violating Islamic rules.

Interestingly, Shahrazad noted how the traditional abaya is not regarded as a religious requirement but is rooted within the culture of Saudi Arabia. Shahrazad talked about how Islam as a religion does not demand specific types of clothing for women, it encourages all women to be modest in the way that they wear clothing that covers their body and head, and that should be enough. Distinguishing between a religious requirement and what is culture gave Shahrazad the space where she is able to enjoy playing sports with suitable clothing and still align with Islamic rules.

From the stories above, many of the young women found the abaya a hindrance to their participation in PA and sports. They credited factors such as PA in itself, weather, family, and culture which create challenges for women to be physically active. However, for some participants, their preference for exercising in closed places such as their homes or in the club comes first, so that the issue of the abaya will not be pertinent. Other women choose to use

different dress styles, particularly sports abayas, which enable them to practise different sporting activities and still be compatible with Islamic principles.

As discussed above, the participants reported how Saudi society is not supportive of women's sports, which are not commonly associated with appropriate feminine behaviour. Therefore, this idea around femininity and appropriate behaviour for women living in a country such as Saudi Arabia appears to be an important element that will be expanded in greater detail in the next subsection.

5.3.2.2. Femininity

5.3.2.2.1. Being Situated within their Arabic Cultures

Some of the young women in this study are strongly influenced by the processes of cultural identity within their Arabic cultures. Atheer, 20, Amira, 21, members of a university sports association and Bushra, 20, not a member of a university sports association, are examples of young women who position themselves clearly within the framework of their Arabic identity. They spoke about some of the traditional roles for women within their society and how practising sports is not considered a part of these roles, as seen in the following extracts:

I feel that our traditions do not support women's practise of sports, meaning that they force women to sit at home and serve the family and husband (Atheer).

...There are also people who still think it is not suitable for women to go to a club to do a sport, that sport is not for girls, and they see it as not important for them (Amira).

I agree that there is a certain group of people who say that it is forbidden for girls to play basketball and football. These sports are suitable for boys, not girls (Bushra).

Atheer, Amira and Bushra's narratives suggest that taking part in sports is not the norm in Saudi culture; being a wife and serving family and husband are more closely linked with women's roles. These women recognised that playing sports, such as basketball and football, is not perceived as feminine behaviour within their community. Interestingly, these stereotypes that surround domestic femininity are not limited to the young participants in this study but are also experienced by some white non-Muslim women practising sports (Harris, 2005). In his work on women's football, Harris (2005) wrote about the perception that certain women are considered to be too pretty to play sports. Harris (2005) argued that for a very long time, sport has been associated with masculinity and that the desirable femininity associated with prettiness is often put in question when women cross socially constructed gender demarcations (Cox and Thompson, 2000). Ola, 23, a member of a university sports association, spoke about how members of her online community, on Twitter in particular, associate sports with masculinity and question the gender identity of a social media influencer:

Their comments always involve rejection and belittling of women, and they tell us that sports are only suitable for boys. They write comments asking whether this is a girl or a boy. This is a mockery of girls because they think that they are out of the ordinary and out of their nature (Ola).

Ola's narrative shows how the femininity of the social media influencer is brought into question when male commentators ask whether she is a boy or girl because these men think

that what the social media influencer is doing is not suitable for a woman and detracts from her nature as a woman. This image of female athletes categorised as boys is also experienced by non-Arabic and non-Muslim female athletes in the work of McClung and Blinde (2002), cited in Sahil and Dhauta (2018), where women athletes in their study were stereotyped as being 'tomboy' and/or 'masculine.'

Other young participants discussed how a woman within their Arabic societies is encouraged to maintain a particular physical appearance and image i.e., being plump or fat and being physically unfit, as these characteristics are considered to be symbolic of feminine beauty:

There are widespread ideas among our society in which we prefer a girl to be plump, fat, meaning she does not have to be physically fit, and a woman who has these characteristics is considered a beautiful woman (Ola).

Indeed, these young women's stories reflect how they are strongly influenced by the processes of cultural maintenance, which have developed through the socialisation of a type of femininity that involves being a wife, mother and maintaining a particular physical appearance and image. These notions of femininity should not be interpreted as exclusive to the young women in this study. Research shows that in the USA, women are often socialised to take up passive roles and to fulfil the traditional roles of housewife and mother (Levant et al, 2007). Sport is still viewed by many as a male activity (Jakubowska and Byczkowska-Owczarek, 2018). Interestingly, Jakubowska and Byczkowska-Owczareks' (2018) work on children's sports in Poland, found that playing football and boxing was considered a problem for women due to the belief that such sports were not suitable for their nature as women. This is similar to Saudi Arabia where women, as the participants reported, are not encouraged

to practise football and basketball for the same reason. Therefore, what is seen as gendered activities in both countries-Poland and Saudi Arabia-is not that different.

5.3.2.2.2. Challenging their Arabic Cultures and Reworking New Ideals of Femininities

Some of the young women in this study are challenging the boundaries of their Arabic identity. Sarah, 25, a member of a university sports association, did not identify with her Arabic culture. She contested her community's ideas of gender and what is appropriate behaviour for young women in Saudi Arabia. Sarah challenged the gendered discourses that are widespread within her online community, where it is believed that women should stay at home and should not play sports:

...They say that women should not do something they are not used to, that sports are not for women, and sitting at home is better. I see that sport is very important, both physically and psychologically, but our Saudi society sees that as not essential. Whoever says this is a trivial person and society must get rid of all these negative thoughts (Sarah).

Despite Sarah being positioned within these gendered discourses, she continued to show her own agency and expressed a desire to be physically active because she considered sports as important and one of her rights.

Other women's views on femininity differ in different ways from the traditionally available norms of marriage, motherhood, and inactivity. Ola, 23 and Atheer, 20, members of a university sports association, questioned the predominant idea within their society that sport is a male activity and inappropriate for women. In the interviews, they talked about how some online commentators on Twitter believe that sport will lead to women developing muscles

like those of men and they then will depart from the feminine nature that God created for them:

They say that sport is not for women and it does not suit her nature as a female. When a woman exercises, she will develop muscles like men and will depart from her nature which God created. I do not like this talk as I see sport as very important for a woman, essential to our life. It is not true that if a woman practises sports, she will be like a man. She can do a sport and maintain her femininity (Ola).

Many people have false ideas about women's sports...They say that sports are not for women, they say you should not carry weights, let it be for men, why do you do this? It is not your job. These celebrities have changed a lot of these concepts. You see a beautiful girl, her body is symmetrical and tidy, and she has muscles. They [celebrities] came to us with the idea that it is normal to have muscles and have a feminine appearance. This does not mean that I change and become a male, my form remains but my body is more muscular and stronger (Atheer).

Ola and Atheer's narratives suggest that many people in Saudi society believe that femininity is a gift from God; women should preserve this gift and should not engage in sport as it is not commensurate with the nature that God created. Ola and Atheer do not only oppose these views, but they have come to the belief that it is normal for a woman to practise sports and to have a strong body. This does not mean that a woman with a muscular body will change to become a man, she will remain feminine, but her body will be more muscular and stronger. These findings are not new and limited to the young women in this study; similar findings

have been reported in the work of Walseth (2006), where some of the Norwegian Muslim women in her study opposed their cultures' ideals of femininity and created alternative ideals where they can see themselves as mother, athlete and a working woman.

Together, these perspectives provide important insight into how being a woman within an Arabic culture implies a family-oriented ideal, with much time spent at home, caring for her husband and other family members. She is encouraged to maintain a particular plumpness and to avoid sports and PA. These are the hegemonic notions of femininity to which these women refer. As emphasised above, the young participants responded differently to these notions of femininity. Some still referred to the ideas of being a wife and mother, having to maintain a particular physical appearance and being physically unfit. While others challenged them and created alternative ideals of femininity where they can practise sports and have muscular and strong bodies while still maintaining a feminine appearance. Therefore, the notions of femininity in contemporary Arabic cultures are not fixed or static but they can be seen in different ways.

5.3.3. Family's Influence in Doing Physical Activity and Sports

5.3.3.1. The Family Enabling Physical Activity Opportunities

In the course of this study, it became evident that the support of family members is particularly important in providing Saudi young women with opportunities for PA and sports, similar to the findings by Kenz et al (2012); Stride and Flintoff (2017). This is reflected in various ways in the young participants' narratives. Walaa, 22, a member of a university sports association, discussed how her family members enable her participation in PA, as stated below:

My mother supports and encourages me, so I continue to practise sports. She goes with me to the club; we go out in public places and walk. She has a big role in my life when it comes to sports (Walaa).

Walaa's parents, especially her mother, are supportive of her sports activities, encouraging and also joining her in certain activities. Aside from Walaa, there are also other women whose parents have been encouraging in their PA. Ohoud, 23, a member of a university sports association, her father provides her with transport to the town, enabling her active participation in the sports club:

My father, maybe because he was a former athlete, was excited for us to play sports. He was the one who took me to the club, even though it's far away. He was the one who got excited (Ohoud).

Ohoud's narrative is very interesting because in Saudi Arabia, fathers usually have authority over their daughters and are more likely to be against the idea of their female children participating in sports. But Ohoud's father has been very enthusiastic and supportive of her sports. These positive attitudes from her father show an alternative to the common attitudes toward sports in Saudi Arabia.

To further understand the role of the family, we need to look beyond parental influences and also consider the role of siblings and other family members. For some of the women, the role which siblings have played in their daily PA has been more significant. According to Lama, 23, a member of a university sports association:

My family and my brothers are my biggest supporters in practising sports. My brothers and I are very keen on performing sports together. We also choose our food very carefully; we focus on healthy eating (Lama).

In Lama's example, the idea that both men and women come together and play sports is very interesting, as it shows that there are occasions when it is acceptable for men and women to undertake sports together, as is shown with Lama and her brothers.

It is evident that a number of young women's families facilitate their participation in PA and sports. This includes providing support, playing together, providing transport, coaching and planning healthy meals together. However, the narratives of other participants also show that some families are far from happy when their daughters wish to take up a sport, as will be shown in the following subsection.

5.3.3.2. Challenges to Saudi Young Women's Physical Activity Opportunities

The relationship between family and PA participation also highlights the fact that some parents restrict their daughters' agency and limit their PA opportunities. Similar results are also to be found in the work of Kenz et al (2012); Stride and Flintoff (2017); Walseth (2006). This is reflected in different ways in a number of the young women's stories in this study. Shahrazad, 21, not a member of a university sports association, talked about how her parents-the mother especially-believe that she does not need to do exercise since she is already fit and has a beautiful body:

...My parents, especially my mother, see that fat people are those who must exercise. She kept telling me that I am slim and healthy, why should I exercise?

Her thinking is similar to others who say that sport is only for people who want to lose weight (Shahrazad).

Shahrazad's narrative suggests that her parents have limited views of sports. They consider sports as only about weight management, obesity and health. They do not recognise other reasons that might trigger their daughters to practise sports such as having fun, community building and mental health. Interestingly, the idea that sports could be encouraged when the person has a health condition or is overweight or obese is not confined to the women in this study; other studies found similar findings (Aljayyousi et al, 2019). In their study on university students living in Qatar, Aljayyousi and colleagues found that some of the participants reported that their parents were not concerned about them being physically active. Their parents believed that adolescents or young adults do not need to do sports since they are still young, and they do not suffer from a health condition.

Some participants recognised how gendered expectations and assumptions that are placed on them by their parents influence their PA opportunities. When I asked Sheikha, 23, not a member of a university sports association, if she liked to take part in sports and join sporting campaigns, she spoke about how her parents-her father especially-was against such an idea:

My family opposes the idea of sports, women campaigns, and participation in those. My father is opposed to everything. He thinks that women's lives should only be about her husband, her house, and her studies (Sheikha).

Ranad, 21, a member of a university sports association, also described how her parents are deeply concerned when she practises sporting activities, in particular lifting heavy weights, because they feel that this will affect her health, and her womb, and will prevent her from becoming a mother in the future:

My family does not support me, sometimes when they see me lifting heavy weights, they tell me: "Why do you do this, this is not good for your health and it is affecting you as a woman, it will affect your womb" (Ranad).

Such parental expectations that surround women's roles have been reported in studies with other Muslim girls and women living in Western countries. For example, in Kay's (2006) study, British parents were identified as key in both supporting and restricting their daughters' sports participation. Many of the girls in her study recognised how certain gendered expectations, such as being a mother, were given priority by their parents over their involvement in sports and education (as I discussed earlier in Section 5.3.2.2).

The excerpts from the young women's narratives reflect how they are accepting of parental authority, sharing their parents' views on what is the appropriate behaviour for Saudi women. However, as will be discussed next, the young participants' also showed individualism in how they negotiated with the influence of their families.

5.3.3.3. Saudi Young Women Actively Negotiating their Physicality

Some young women's accounts suggest that they are not passive recipients of their family discourses. They exercise their agency in challenging their parental discourses in different ways. Many women did this by drawing on discourses on health and obesity, expressing a desire to be physically active to achieve the ideal body shape. This idea is shown in the interviews as reflected by Amal, 21, not a member of a university sports association, below:

At first, I was enthusiastic about sports. I used to watch videos and talk to my family about my desire to go to the club. They did not like it and did not accept the idea because my parents think I am already thin and that my body is good.

But when I entered the club, and started sports, it helped me change my mood for the better, my health was better, and I got in good shape (Amal).

Despite Amal's parents' disapproval, she continued to exert agency and expressed desire to be physically active to achieve the ideal body shape and have a healthy body.

Some women questioned the gendered assumptions held by their parents, who believe that sport is a muscular activity and women who practise sport will build a muscular appearance for themselves, as seen in Amjad's, 21, a member of a university sports association, story:

My family was against my exercise. They had widespread old-fashioned ideas of sports not being good for the body, that I will have muscles and will be like a man, and no one would marry me, but this talk did not affect me much. I started to rely on my own opinion and started exercising and continued with it (Amjad).

Amjad's narrative of her parents trying to prevent her from practising sports due to the fear of developing male characteristics are experienced by other white non-Muslim girls. Jakubowska and Byczkowska-Owczarek (2018) in their work on children's sports in Poland, found that parents discouraged their children, especially boys, from playing sports or taking exercises such as dance and this is often due to their concerns over them becoming womanly and gay. Also, girls who want to practise football or boxing are discouraged and threatened by the view that they will develop a male figure and crooked legs. In this study, despite the opposition of Amjad's parents to her sport, she continued to show her individuality and expressed a desire to be physically active. This includes relying on her own opinion and finding her own ways to be physically active.

In conclusion, some participants found support from their parents when it comes to their participation in PA and sports. Other women showed how their parents were not happy with their wish to take up sports. However, other participants emerged as active agents in negotiating the influence of their families. They expressed a desire to be physically active due to their interest in a healthy body and being in good shape, while others relied on their own opinions and in finding their own ways to be active.

As discussed earlier, many of the participants reported their preference to practise sports in private spaces, such as women-only gyms, because such spaces would provide them with many benefits when it comes to their sport participation. Therefore, it is appropriate alongside the religious and cultural norms discussed, to reflect on other factors that may play a role in Saudi women's experiences of PA and sports. This will be discussed next.

5.4. Structural Constraints

5.4.1. Lack of Sporting Facilities and High Memberships Fees of Gyms

Across the categories of participants, some of the young women in this study expressed their concerns that there are few or no sports facilities that admit women and that all of them are far away from the residential areas where they live. Serene, 23, a member of a university sports association, stated:

For me, I suffer because the neighbourhood in which I live is new. It is difficult for me to find sports clubs. All the sports clubs are far from me (Serene).

Amjad, 21, a member of a university sports association, also commented on the relative lack of availability of sporting facilities for women, compared to those that are available for men:

I agree with the girls about the lack of women's sports clubs. I see that there are far more sports clubs for men than there are sports clubs for women (Amjad).

Some young woman, Dalia, 21, a member of a university sports association, recognised how the high subscription fees to join gyms can also present a challenge to their sport participation:

I live in a new residential area and there are no sports clubs for women. Even if you find a women's gym, you will encounter the problem of high prices for participation (Dalia).

Evidence gleaned from my conversations with Serene, Amjad and Dalia noted their strong concern about the lack of facilities and the high membership fees of the clubs in the areas where they live. These factors have played a significant role in their decision to participate in PA and sports. These results resonate with studies with young women in both Arabic and Western countries (e.g., Donnelly et al, 2018; King et al, 1992) which also report issues with access to facilities.

However, while the young women's stories revealed evidence of the influence of issues such as limited sports facilities and the high cost of sports clubs on their sporting participation, their stories also suggest that their experiences were not totally defined by these issues. As will be discussed next, the young women's stories also show agency in the ways they counter these challenges.

Resourcefulness and creativity helped them navigate the influence of these structural issues, as Dalia, 21, a member of a university sports association, stated:

I created my own gym at home with simple capabilities. At the beginning, I did not have weights, so I used to bring large water containers and get rid of water, put stones and sand in them, and practise with them. By doing this, I don't have to pay this huge amount of money to these clubs (Dalia).

Dalia did not let the absence of sports clubs and their high cost determine her involvement in PA. She searched for other alternatives, using her home as a place to practise sports, with the help of simple equipment. Dalia did not have to go to sports clubs and pay huge amounts of money.

Therefore, it can be seen how issues such as the lack of women's sporting facilities and the high cost of fees for sports clubs present challenges to the opportunities for these young women's PA. However, the discussions also show that these women are critically engaging with these issues and finding solutions such as creating closed places (e.g., gyms in their homes) that meet their needs, which enable them to participate in the physical activities they are keen to practise.

5.4.2. Lack of Government Support

Regarding women's sports, the Saudi Arabian government's official statements have veered between outright rejection and vague promises of liberalisation, when they speak of expanding opportunities for girls and women to engage in physical activities (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Although the Saudi government has given a green light to women's sports clubs, many of the young women in this study reported (as I discussed in Sub-Section 5.4.1.) that these facilities are still lacking. The only clubs that are available to them are provided by commercial entities

which are inaccessible to many and too expensive. This idea that society is not supportive of women's sports was discussed earlier in Section 5.2.

5.5. Concluding Discussion

The objective of this chapter is to explore Saudi women's understandings and experiences of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. In particular, it explores how ideas of place, Islam, traditions and society's beliefs, family influence and structural issues influence their constructions of PA and sports.

In relation to their understandings of PA, sports and the place where they practise them, the results revealed that the participants made a clear distinction between what they mean by public and private spaces. Interestingly, there was a strong agreement among the participants that engaging in PA and sports should mainly be in places that felt private, for that allows them to have some degree of control over time, the cost of fitness equipment and who will be present during their exercise in these places.

The results revealed that many of the participants considered walking as the most appropriate sporting activity for women to undertake in public. These participants attributed this to religious and cultural traditions. The results also revealed there were participants who challenged religious pressures and expectations, and demonstrated a willingness to practise other sporting activities, alongside walking, in public. In doing so, these participants did not see practising sports in public as being against their religious identities, because as women, they will carefully follow their religious requirements. Others brought up gender equity, saying that women have equal rights as men and this has secured more opportunities for them to practise sports in public.

The findings also showed that many of the participants advocated for the need to be segregated from men when they take up sports and PA. This was often voiced as due to their religious and cultural beliefs, as well as their concerns over issues related to privacy from men. The results also showed there were some women who challenged their religious expectations and showed an acceptance of the right to practise sports in a mixed-gender setting. In this case, the women did not see a mixing of the sexes as against their identities as Muslim women, because they could practise sports in public in a way that is compatible with religion. Other participants drew attention to gender relations, saying that the interaction between the sexes in sports will lead both men and women to have a better understanding of each other.

As regards Islam, many of the participants considered that it has positive attitudes towards women's sports; this was often due to its health and recreational aspects. However, some participants found the religious requirements associated with the use of the hijab and the gender segregation act as barriers restricting their participation in sports and PA. Other women pointed to the power relations within society as an obstacle to their sports. These women thought that Islam is supportive of women's sports, but Saudi society is against such an idea as they regard it as inappropriate behaviour for women.

Concerning traditions and society's beliefs, the findings revealed that women playing sports are not the norm in Saudi culture; being a wife and serving her family and husband are more closely linked to female roles. Women are also encouraged to maintain a particular physical appearance; there is an image of a woman with a fat body who is not interested in sports and PA. These were the normative notions of femininity to which the young women in this study refer. As reported in the findings, some of these women incorporate these notions of

femininity as an ideal where they see themselves as wives and mothers, maintaining a particular physical appearance and being physically unfit. Others challenged them; and some created alternative ideals of femininity where they, as women, can practise sports and have a muscular and stronger body, and at the same time, they still can maintain a feminine appearance.

With regard to family influence, the participants reported how the support of their family members was particularly significant in providing them with opportunities for PA and sports. However, other women discussed how their family restricted their agency and limited their PA and sports opportunities. The results also reported that there were some women who challenged the influence of their family in their quest to be physically active. They drew on health and obesity discourses, expressing a desire to practise sport to achieve the ideal body shape while others relied on their own opinions and found ways to be active.

Concerning structural constraints, the findings demonstrated how some women expressed concerns over having few or no sporting facilities open to them in the areas where they live. And if they found that there were sporting facilities, the subscription fees were very expensive. However, the findings also illustrated that some participants demonstrated their ability to navigate the influence of these structural constraints by creating closed places that meet their needs and also enable them to practise the sport they are keen on.

To conclude, the results showed evidence of the role that place, religion, tradition, society's beliefs, family and structural issues play in Saudi young women's understandings and experiences of PA and sports. These results align with my earlier observations, which showed how Muslim girls and women encounter multiple challenges and influences when it comes to their participation in sports and PA; these challenges and influences are often associated with

cultural and religious traditions, as well as structural limitations (Jiwani and Rail, 2010; Sfeir, 1985; De Knop et al, 1996; Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Walseth, 2006; Khan et al, 2012; Walseth, 2015).

However, the results also showed how women expressed agency in ways that enable them to counter the influence of these traditions and limitations. In this regard, some women, in their narratives, were actively challenging the influence of cultural, religious and structural traditions, rather than simply accepting them. Others were actively engaging with these traditions and critically selecting from them and making some of their own, where they were able to create new and alternative identities for themselves (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Ali et al, 2020).

The next chapter moves on to discuss how Saudi women interpret the impact of different forms of PA-and sport-focused digital campaigning for women in Saudi Arabia. This chapter will cover their understandings of online campaigns organised by governmental and non-governmental organisations, online sport and fitness personalities and social media influencers.

Chapter 6. Understandings of Digital Campaigning on Physical Activity and Sports Targeting Women in Saudi Arabia

6.1. Introduction

With the rise of social media platforms, they have emerged as significant avenues for promoting campaigns on diverse topics. In this regard, women activists have recognised and embraced these platforms as influential spaces for activism and active participation (Clark, 2015). Throughout Saudi Arabia, numerous feminists have increasingly utilised social media as a potent medium to voice their thoughts, communicate their experiences and challenges, and raise awareness about social issues they consider significant (Abdullatif, 2013; Hurley, 2019; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018). An important aspect of their online engagement is their active involvement in PA and sports (Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa, 2020).

Social media platforms have opened up novel avenues for participation, expanding beyond specific causes and providing opportunities for expressing citizenship, particularly among social groups that have historically faced challenges in having their voices acknowledged (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). With reference to the rise of islamophobia, racism, and sexism, this holds true for Muslim women who are actively striving to transform societal perceptions and reshape how they are perceived in the world (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). Within the reference of sports, there is a growing body of research exploring how celebrity athletes and female sports figures are leveraging social media platforms to enhance their visibility and engage in digital sports activism. Through these endeavours, they actively challenge prevailing stereotypes, and cultural gender norms, and strive to bring about social change in

the context of women's sports (e.g., Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). The aim of this chapter is to explore how Saudi young women interpret the impact of different forms of digital campaigning targeting women focused on PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. The chapter will cover their understandings of online campaigns organised by governmental and non-governmental organisations, online sports and fitness personalities and social media influencers.

It is important to mention that this chapter is based entirely on the analysis of focus group data. As detailed in Chapter Four, in my sample I interviewed some women who were members of a university sports association and others who were not and at different stages of their studies. In the analysis, I systematically looked at university level and membership in sports association to see if they influenced women's responses, but both factors were not significant.

In the following section, I will first explore Saudi women's general understandings of what constitutes digital campaigning. Then I will move on to explore their observations of Saudi society's responses to online campaigning around PA and sports. This chapter will conclude by discussing the potential impact of socio-cultural and religious factors on Saudi women's understandings of these forms of digital campaigning.

6.2. Understandings of Digital Campaigning Targeting Women Around Physical Activity and Sports

In this section, I present and discuss data related to Saudi women's general understandings of digital campaigning around PA and sports focused on women. Within this, I will explore the

roles of governmental and non-governmental organisations, online sportswomen and social media influencers.

6.2.1. The Role of Governmental Organisations

Within my own research, during the focus groups, many of the young women spoke passionately about their personal experiences of digital campaigns and how such campaigns were important for them at a personal and individual level. For example, Lama, 23, a member of a university sports association and Bushra, 20, not a member of a university sports association, discussed how online walking campaigns, particularly those organised by the Saudi government were significant to them as such campaigns encouraged and motivated them to overcome laziness and inactivity, as they reflected:

Yes, I participated in the Walk campaign on World Diabetes Day, which was organised by the Saudi government for women...These governmental walking campaigns motivate me personally to do sport with them. Such campaigns encourage me to move and not sit all the time, and not do anything and be lazy. On the contrary, I say to myself, 'they do a sport, why am I not playing sports like them?' (Lama).

I agree with the girls that these governmental campaigns on walking give motivation and enthusiasm to play sports. Sometimes some girls say: "We want to play sports, but we feel lazy and lethargic". When they see such campaigns, they feel like getting active and getting up (Bushra).

Sona, 25, not a member of a university sports association, is another participant in this research who also appreciated the role of online governmental campaigns in her personal life.

Sona talked about how seeing such campaigns on Twitter motivated her to practise sports, especially when she is busy with other things during the day:

Such governmental campaigns, when I see them on Twitter, make me feel enthusiastic to play sports, even if I am busy with my studies and have not done any sport for a while. The first time I see these campaigns, I get up from my place to play sports (Sona).

Thus far, it has been shown how online governmental campaigns were critically important for the young women in this study. According to these women, such campaigns encouraged and motivated them to overcome their laziness and inactivity as well as to remind them to practise sports, especially when they were busy with other things during the day. Next, I will discuss how non-governmental, grassroots campaigns in particular were also important for the participants as these served as avenues for them to challenge Saudi social and cultural norms when it comes to their participation in sports and PA.

6.2.2. The Role of Grassroot Organisations

According to Kaufman and Wolff (2010); Carstensen (2013), the rapid emergence of social networking sites also led to activists embracing these as powerful spaces through which they organise events, empower each other, and mobilise and advocate for individual and collective social change. Within this study, the participants noted how grassroots sporting campaigns were significant, specifically as they provided them with a means to overcome or challenge social norms and cultural obstacles in relation to women's sports in Saudi Arabia. These participants credited social media grassroots campaigns with helping them push back social

barriers, by holding runs and walk in public spaces, as Ranad, 21 and Rawan, 22, members of a university sports association, explained in the following excerpt:

I saw many grassroots campaigns, and there was a certain group of people engaging in a specific activity on Instagram and Twitter...These campaigns affected me personally and affected my sister. Seeing photos of people walking in public places, encouraged me and my sister to get dressed and go out for a walk, and I see that this kind of campaign makes me excited (Ranad).

...As for people I know, there was one of my relatives that followed such grassroots campaigns and when she saw pictures of girls there, she created a women's team. Now she gathers with girls every day, and they walk in public places together (Rawan).

As these extracts illustrate, Ranad and Rawan had positive attitudes towards online grassroots campaigns. Seeing such campaigns on social media encouraged them and their relatives to follow in their footsteps when they come together regularly to practise sports in public places. The idea that sports can be seen as an opportunity for a group of people with whom you are most comfortable, such as friends and other family members, to come together and practise collectively in public spaces was discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I illustrated how some participants did not mind practising sports in public, such as in a mixed marathon, because for them, it is a group activity, in the company of their friends and relatives, rather than on an individual basis.

Furthermore, some participants in this study, such as Atheer, 20, a member of a university sports association, believed that grassroots campaigns are particularly important for Saudi

young women as they empower those who lack the courage to challenge Saudi social norms, especially when it comes to their participation in sports, as she stressed:

I honestly find grassroots campaigns that aim to encourage women to practise sport are very important for Saudi women. Such campaigns can increase the confidence of some girls who do not have the courage or the dare to practise sports. This might be because their family or society do not accept such an idea as they do not consider it as part of their traditional roles and therefore unsuitable for them to do. After joining such campaigns, their self-confidence increases, and thus, they can persuade their family or society and they can also encourage other women to take up sports (Atheer).

Atheer's narrative shows how grassroots campaigns can inspire Saudi women, especially those who lack the courage to take up sports as such an act is considered by their family and society as inappropriate behaviour. The significant role of such campaigns showed Atheer and other Saudi women that there was no harm for them in participating in sports activities while also performing other roles in their community, such as being mothers and wives. I reflected upon this new idea around femininity or being a woman in more detail in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I discussed how there are some participants in this study who oppose their culture's ideals of femininity that are marked by marriage, motherhood, and inactivity. They imagine different forms of femininity which go beyond the traditional notion, seeing themselves as mothers, athletes and working women.

Indeed, the understanding from the young women's narratives reflects how online sporting campaigns, whether organised by governmental or non-governmental organisations, have played critical roles in their participation in sports. As the participants reported, governmental

campaigns have provided them with the opportunity to throw off their inactivity as well as to remind them to practise sports, especially when they were busy with other things during the day. When it comes to non-governmental, particularly grassroots campaigns, the participants reported that they were able, through such campaigns, to challenge Saudi social norms, particularly about practising sports in public spaces, as well as to encourage them to feel brave enough to follow their sports ambitions.

As discussed above, the participants reported how social media served as an avenue for PA and sport participation. However, I will discuss in the next section how social media helped develop new forms of activism, which do not necessarily have to direct people towards particular causes or certain outcomes but can be used, as in this research, to increase the visibility of sportswomen and social media influencers. This has played a particular role in increasing the Saudi public's level of awareness of women's sports and created a change of attitude in Saudi Arabian society about women's sports (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020).

6.2.3. The Role of Sportswomen and Social Media Influencers

Another important element that emerged from the focus group discussions is the way in which sportswomen and social media influencers were critically important, as they have contributed significantly to raising the Saudi Arabians' public awareness and knowledge of PA and sports; and how they were particularly able to open up Saudi society to the idea of women's sports. Lama, 23, a member of a university sports association, for example, is among the participants in this study who discussed how online fitness personalities have been very important for her personally, and how through them she has been able to increase her knowledge and information of sports, as she reflected:

Yes, I know a lot of Saudi and non-Saudi fitness personalities on social media who are interested in sports and healthy eating. For example, I know Zeina, a Saudi fitness trainer who has an Instagram account called Zeina_ast, and I also know a non-Saudi coach, Rahaf who has a YouTube channel called Rahaf Fitness. I have been in the field of sports for nearly 11 years, since when I was in middle school. These people have a great influence on me, and they taught me many things about sports, for example, what are the types of exercises and techniques, as well as healthy eating and diets (Lama).

In her statement, Lama shows how the social media content that are provided by Saudi and non-Saudi sports and fitness personalities on social media have been very important in her knowledge of sports. Such content has taught her many different types of exercises and techniques, as well as healthy eating and diets. This is not a new finding and is not limited to young women in this study. Similar findings have been reported in the work of Goodyear et al (2019). In their study, Goodyear et al (2019) noted that recently, as social networking sites gained popularity, many young people have turned to these for health-related information in areas such as PA, diet/nutrition and body image. Social media sites, especially those provided by sport and fitness women and men, as reported by young people in Goodyear's (2019) study, were viewed as credible sources of information because these people know what they are talking about, and they are considered experts.

Other participants, such as Sarah, 25, a member of a university sports association and Zekra, 22, not a member of a university sports association, provided further insights into the role of sportswomen and influencers. They particularly discussed how online Saudi and non-Saudi sportswomen and influencers, through the content they share online, have helped increase

Saudi society's acceptance of women's sports leading to how it has now become normal for some Saudi women to practise sports, as they reflected below:

Frankly, I follow a lot of people, but among people who helped me in this journey is Rachael Newsham, a British fitness trainer who has an account on Instagram called rachael_newsham...I honestly see that these famous coaches and trainers make an excellent effort because they share good content online that increases people's understanding of performing sports, whether they are men or women, but especially women, which gives good results (Sarah).

Yes, I follow many influencers online, for example, I follow a Saudi influencer called Layali, who has an interest in beauty, fashion and hairstyle...This point is of great importance because we are a closed and conservative society, and this will be a way to make society and people more open, with the increase in knowledge and awareness of sports and women's sports in particular... Without these influencers, people would have looked at women's sports in a strange way, but now because of them, everyone sees the matter as normal and sees girls playing sports as normal (Zekra).

Zekra's view was echoed by Sarah, 24, not a member of a university sports association, who argued:

Yes, I watch a lot of them, most of them are from coaches of the club that they are participating in, and there is a famous coach called Rahaf, she is non-Saudi and has a YouTube channel called Rahaf Fitness...We have a concept that women must be at home, and it is her place to develop the home, but not to do

sports. They want to put you in a dark box and lock you up, and men control you, but now, 'Praise be to God', and because of these coaches, there has become more awareness of the importance of women's sports and how it is one of women's rights, and it is not true that their place is at home only (Sarah).

From Sarah's narrative we can see how, traditionally, women's roles within the Saudi Arabian culture only revolved around the idea of caring for their homes. If they wanted to develop themselves, this could happen only in their homes. They also should not do something that they were not used to, such as playing sports. However, because of non-Saudi sportswomen's efforts on social media, there has been a change in the position of Saudi women, and now practising sports has started to be seen as one of their basic rights in life.

Sona, 25, not a member of a university sports association, is another young woman in this study, who provided an important insight into the role that online Saudi coaches play in increasing public understandings of women's sports, particularly in relation to playing sports in public. She made this comment:

There is a Saudi Coach named Taghreed who is great, and she shows me things about sports on Instagram...Of course, they have a big chance, they have changed things in our society. Every day, for example, they take pictures while they play sports, and they post them on social media to show people and women in particular how sport is important for them...There are many things that seemed impossible to happen, but they have happened now thanks to the influence of these coaches in society. Once upon a time, it was impossible for women to walk, for example, or go biking in the street, or run with a group of

girls in the street. Society was against this thing, but then it became somewhat acceptable. This is thanks to the coaches who encourage people, especially women, to practise sports and physical activity in public (Sona).

Sona discussed how Saudi sportswomen take photos of themselves while they practise sports and share them with their followers. By doing this, they advocate the importance of practice, for women in particular. Sona said that it was traditionally impossible for Saudi women to walk or ride a bike in the street or even to run with a group in the street. Saudi society was against such an idea, but because of these Saudi sportswomen's efforts on social media and what they share online, the idea of women practising sports in public is now more tolerated by the public.

In the same vein, Ohoud, 23, a member of a university sports association, mentioned the following:

I follow many on social media, particularly on Instagram, from Saudi. For example, I know Haya Sawan and Nouf Khayyat, they are both health and fitness trainers...Regarding women's sports, these fitness personalities made people accept the idea of women practising sports in sports clubs. After them, the number of women's sports clubs increased. If we made a comparison between the number of clubs, for example ten years ago and now, we would find that the clubs today have become many. So many parents allowed their daughters to participate in sports clubs and they did not mind this. This would have not happened if there were no supportive people, and people active in this subject (Ohoud).

Ohoud's narrative demonstrates how Saudi health and fitness trainers have contributed to an increase in the public's consciousness of women's sports, particularly around the idea of practising sports in clubs. Ohoud noted that with the support of these trainers, the number of women's gyms has increased in comparison to ten years ago. Ohoud also noted that now many parents are happy for their daughters to participate in these sports clubs and they do not object to such an idea.

Furthermore, the results of this research, as revealed by the participants, show that social media sportswomen have also played a critical role in dispelling many of the widespread misconceptions and myths within Saudi society around women's sports. I reflected upon some of these misconceptions and myths that surround women's sports in more detail in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I discussed, for example, how sport is often regarded as a male activity and therefore is inappropriate for women. According to these views, women who choose to practise sports put themselves in danger of causing harm to their health and their reproductive system in particular (see Chapter Five for more on this).

For example, Lama, 23, a member of a university sports association, noted that there is a belief within Saudi society that sports cannot be practised during menstruation as it will affect women's health. However, according to Lama, these Saudi and non-Saudi sportswomen have contributed to altering such an idea: they have shared posts on social media to showcase how such an idea is not correct and on the contrary, women can practise sports at any time, as she stated:

Yes, I know a lot of Saudi and non-Saudi fitness personalities on social media who are interested in sports and healthy eating. For example, I know Zeina, a Saudi fitness trainer who has an Instagram account called Zeina ast, and I also

know non-Saudi coach, Rahaf who has a YouTube channel called Rahaf Fitness...Yes, I agree with the girls, and I see that these fitness personalities are of great importance because they corrected rumours and a prevailing thought, that sports cannot be practised during menstruation, that it is not good for women's health. They shared posts on social media saying that such an idea was not correct, and women can do sports at any time (Lama).

Another participant, Ranad, 21, a member of a university sports association, talked about another important issue that relates to playing sports during pregnancy and asserted the following:

Yes, I know a lot, and I know many Saudi girls like, for example, Coach Rehab, Coach Banan and Coach Taghreed...I also agree with the girls that these sportswomen have contributed to changing many ideas about women's sports...As you see a famous pregnant sports coach who exercises and advises people that they should do sports and tell them about its importance for women in their various situations, even if she is pregnant, because this helps her in childbirth and will not affect her health and pregnancy (Ranad).

In her example, Ranad talked about how Saudi sportswomen have contributed to changing ideas about playing sports during pregnancy. Ranad discussed that when sportswomen show photos of themselves playing sports while they are pregnant, they are making the point that sports are always important for women and will not affect their health or pregnancy. On the contrary, sports will even help them during childbirth.

Similarly, Rawan, 22, a member of a university sports association, another participant in this study, said the following:

Among people I know Chloe Ting, a non-Saudi fitness personality who has a YouTube channel...Yes, I agree with her that these fitness personalities have changed many ideas. For example, people understand that no matter how much a girl exercises, she will not get muscles like that of men, and it is impossible for her to look like that except with external things like pills or nutritional supplements. And also, lifting weights will not change a woman's shape to become like a man. Women can practise any sports, including lifting weights, and also retain their femininity as a woman (Rawan).

These remarks by Rawan show how non-Saudi sportswomen, in their use of social media, have helped to alter many incorrect ideas about women's sports. For example, according to Rawan, it has become more obvious now that lifting weights will not change the appearance of women and will not cause a woman to 'look like a man'. On the contrary, women can practise lifting weights while retaining their femininity. I reflected upon this new idea around femininity or being a woman, in more detail in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I discussed how some participants questioned the predominant idea within their society that sport is a male activity and thus, inappropriate for women. Such participants had come to the belief that it is normal for a woman to practise sports while having a strong body at the same time. This does not mean that a woman with a muscular body will become a man, she will remain a feminine woman, but her body will be stronger and more muscular.

From the arguments presented above, it is clear that the young participants in this study attributed significance to online sporting campaigns, whether organised by governmental and

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non-governmental organisations, online sportswomen and social media influencers in different contexts. As reported by the participants, governmental campaigns were seen as a venue to motivate and encourage them to overcome their inactivity and laziness and also to motivate them to practise sports, especially when they are busy with other things during the day. Whereas non-governmental, particularly grassroots campaigns were important for the participants in encouraging them to rise above cultural obstacles concerning women's sports in Saudi Arabia. I also discussed how sportswomen and social media influencers, through being more visible online and as enactors of digital activism, can raise the public's awareness and knowledge of PA and sports. They are particularly able to open up Saudi society to the idea of women's sports, hence, it is now more acceptable for Saudi women to practise sports whether in public places or in gyms. I also discussed how online influencers and athletes are of great importance in changing many of the widespread myths and misconceptions around women's sports, for example, in relation to the idea that playing sports during pregnancy and/or during menstruation is harmful, among others. However, as it will be discussed next, some participants in this study were specifically doubtful about the benefits of online campaigns, sportswomen and social media influencers; they questioned the role they may bring to their participation in sports and their ability to change the way Saudi society thinks about women's sports.

6.2.4. Scepticism about the Benefits of Online Campaigns, Sportswomen and Social Media Influencers

Some women in this study questioned the promises of online campaigns, sportswomen and social media influencers and their impact on their participation in PA and sports. For instance, Darren, 20, a member of a university sports association, did not find that digital walking

campaigns that were organised by the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia encouraged people to practise sports, she believed that the matter is all related to individual motivation, as shown below:

I saw Digital Walking Challenge, a campaign that was organised by the Ministry of Health on Instagram; it was a campaign for walking, and they were in the middle of our city. These campaigns did not motivate me. I think it depends on the person before everything, a person must have a will and conviction from the inside that she is practising sports, meaning, what is the importance of the motivation from others if I already have a motive and a will from the inside. Motivation from others will be for a certain period and it ends, but if the person has a will from the inside, she will continue to play sports and it becomes a lifestyle for her (Darren).

Young women like Darren clearly constructed the PA campaigns on Instagram through a postfeminist discourse of individual action, personal responsibility and choice (Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Camacho-Minano et al, 2019; Baer, 2016), framing the will to exercise as something dependent on the people themselves. As such, according to Darren, a person must have a personal conviction that encourages him/her to participate in sports, rather than waiting for external factors, in this case, social media campaigns, to get them motivated and encouraged to play sports.

Shawq, 23, a member of a university sports association, is another young woman in this study who questioned the advantages of government walking campaigns and the change it would bring to Saudi women's PA opportunities. She stressed the following:

No. I don't think it encourages people. I think the walking campaigns that have been launched by Saudi health associations on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram that took place in public places, will have a negative impact more than a positive effect. It is possible that there are some families when they see the campaigns that take place in public places and on the street, they will prevent their daughters from sports, while if they are walking or exercising in a place for women, there will be no problem and they will encourage and support their daughters and these campaigns (Shawq).

Shawq argued that government walking campaigns had more negative impacts on Saudi women's sport participation than positive ones. Shawq attributed the reasons behind this to family. Shawq noted that some families might not be encouraging their daughters to join such campaigns, especially if they are taking place in public settings. I reflected upon the role of the family in relation to women's sport participation in more detail in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I discussed how some families restrict their daughters' agency and limit their opportunities for PA. Family discourses around health and obesity, gender, and cultural beliefs among other things were reported to influence Saudi women's sport participation.

Likewise, Darren, 20, a member of a university sports association, also questioned the effectiveness of online sporting campaigns, particularly grassroots campaigns and she considered the following:

I do not like these grassroots campaigns that aim for running or cycling, I feel that they are more beneficial to men than women. Because if these campaigns are for women, attention will be drawn to them, I mean a large number of people, especially men, will look at these women and there will be chaos and

congestion in the street because people gather to watch these campaigns, but if they are for men, it will not be crowded or chaotic because it will not attract attention. Therefore, it is good for grassroots campaigns to practise their sports in women-only public spaces where there will be only women (**Darren**).

Darren suggested that grassroots sporting campaigns that aim at women will be more problematic than those aimed at men. Darren believed that the problem with grassroots campaigns comes from the fact that these campaigns are doing something that is considered exceptional and out of the ordinary in Saudi Arabian culture. Darren went on to explain her opinion by saying that women who are practising sports in such campaigns will attract the attention of people, particularly, men, who will gather in large numbers to look at what these women are doing, and this could cause chaos and congestion in the street.

This particular statement seems to suggest that Darren does not want the normal way of life in Saudi society to be disrupted by such campaigns; she stressed the importance of any online grassroots sporting campaigns, especially those targeting women, to take into account the existing norms in Saudi Arabia and not to do anything that might cause violation of such norms. According to Darren, such campaigns should consider the need to find a proper public place where women can practise sports freely and also away from males. This idea around how it is difficult for some women living in Saudi Arabia to practise sports, as Darren suggested, running and cycling, in public places, was also discussed in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I discussed how Saudi society is not supportive of women practising physical activities other than walking and how women who choose to practise sports other than walking, for example, running, are subjected to a range of sanctions from members of their community to prevent them from performing such activities.

In the same vein, Dalia, 21, a member of a university sports association, highlighted the following:

Of course, I hope that I will be part of any sports campaign, and this is something that I have no doubts about, but my problem is not that I participate in a campaign, but what is the campaign that I participate in? How do you find a campaign that fits with social norms, because sometimes you do not know whether the campaign has sporting goals or other goals, such as, mixing between women and men...And the campaign I would like to participate in must consider the social norms in Saudi Arabia in terms of modest dressing, the appropriate place for women participants and the need to be segregated from men when they practise their sports. Yes, I agree with my friend Amjad. I hope such campaigns spread, but these need to be done in a correct way. The Saudi government needs to monitor these sport grassroots campaigns and sponsor their ideas. There must be specific preparation, organisation and goal for sport for these campaigns (Dalia).

As this extract illustrates, Dalia, as a Saudi young woman, had no doubts about the importance of sports grassroots campaigns and she would not mind joining them. However, her primary concern is related to which campaigns she would participate in. She had difficulties in finding a campaign that fits with the Saudi Arabian culture and serves her objective, which is practising sports. Dalia, as shown in her narrative, seemed to have a similar viewpoint as that of Darren and she emphasised the importance of grassroots campaigns in abiding with Saudi social norms when it comes to women's participation in sports and PA. The emphasis, according to Dalia, should be given to dress codes and the appropriate place for women

participants and the need to be segregated from men when they practise their sports.

Therefore, to ensure such norms are implemented in the first place, Dalia gave the Saudi government full powers to monitor and regulate these grassroots sporting campaigns.

For other young women, the role their friends play in their participation in PA was more significant than that provided by online sporting grassroots campaigns, as seen in the following extract from Nada, 23, not a member of a university sports association:

I do not feel that this may motivate me to practise sports. What makes me feel most excited is when someone like my friend comes to me to say that this thing is good for your health and your self-esteem, then I will trust her and will be influenced by her. But these online campaigns have a momentary effect and they do not affect the person much, and some people may affect me and others not (Nada).

As in her narrative, Nada showed how online sports grassroots campaigns had not have an influence on her participation in sports. Nada believed that the only way for her to feel encouraged and motivated is when someone, her friends, for example, come and persuade her of the benefits of sports on her health and on her self-esteem; only then will she start practising sports.

The focus group discussions also revealed that some participants were doubtful about the role of online sportswomen and influencers, and particularly their ability to change the way Saudi society thinks about women's sports. This seems to be in line with what was found by Carty and Onyett's (2006) study where it is suggested that most of those who engage with digital activism are likely to be already involved with the issue at the centre of these

campaigns. Hence, while digital media has the possibility to expand information and resources accessible to those who mobilise for social change, it is not clear whether it serves as a tool in bringing new individuals into the movement.

For instance, Joan, 21, not a member of a university sports association and Ola, 23, a member of a university sports association, argued the following:

Frankly, I do not know Saudi personalities, but there is a non-Saudi woman — her name is Jannat. She is American, I think. I feel she is the most influential woman among many people...Now I feel that they are influencing only a certain group of people, many of whom love sports, and maybe after a number of years their influence would be significant and the whole society would adapt to their ideas. It would also be possible to find acceptance after that from opposing parents and husbands (Joan).

I honestly follow a lot, for example, I follow a Saudi woman named Dalal on Twitter. Her sport is weightlifting and I see that she became famous and was able to reach people quickly...I think they will make a big difference to everyone interested in sports, but for those who are not interested in sports, nothing will change (Ola).

From what Joan and Ola said, we can see that these two young women had doubts about the role of social media sportswomen to bring about changes to Saudi society's ways of thinking about women's sports. According to Joan and Ola, these sportswomen will be significant for certain groups of people, those who already love sports and have an interest in them, and those who are expanding their information and looking for resources. However, for those who

do not show any interest in sports, these online sportswomen will not make any difference to them and they will not be able to change their views.

Some of the interviewees in this study mentioned another important factor, which will be discussed in the following subsection, that may play a role in the way that social media influencers change the Saudi public's attitudes towards women's sports: generational differences.

6.2.4.1. Generational Differences

Some of the young women in this study, for example, Serene, 23, a member of a university sports association, pointed to a generational gap in Saudi society concerning the influence of social media influencers. Serene believed that older groups of people, or the pre-nineties generation, will be less influenced by them since these people still adhere to traditions and Islamic views. They have old-fashioned ideas about women's sports that are not easy to change. Meanwhile, younger generations, those from the nineties onwards, are more inclined to accept new ideas and are more open to change so that the impact of social media influencers on them is significant, as she argued for the following:

People who are pre-nineties generation will not be influenced by these influencers. They have little impact on them, since it is the generation that adheres to customs and traditions, and to old ideas about women's sports in particular. And always in any topic, religion is introduced by these people, and this (referring to women's sports) is a mistake. Their thinking is a bit fossilised; they don't accept new ideas easily. It takes effort from us to convince them. In general, the most important is the generation from the nineties onwards, we

are the future generation. We consider ourselves the ones who will build the world ahead (Serene).

Serene continued her argument by emphasising the following:

The generation that will be most affected by these influencers, is the generation of the nineties and onward, because most of the people of this generation own mobile phones, Internet and social media and these things facilitated the spread of these influencers and their ideas about sports and its importance (Serene).

Serene continued her argument by pointing to another important issue, which is related to opportunities of access to the Internet and social media, and how this in return has played an important role in how social media influencers impact Saudi society's ways of thinking about women's sports. Serene believes that social media influencers will particularly influence the younger generation, from the nineties and onwards, as they are more likely to have access to the Internet and social media. As a result, they benefit from the information that these influencers share online. Whereas the older generation is excluded from the online scene and, as a result, they keep their old ideas and thoughts around women's sports. The argument by some women, like Serene, is highlighted by scholars such as Clark (2016); Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2014); Leurs (2016); Warf and Vincent (2007). These authors, in their questioning of the level of individual participation in the online public sphere, identified the problem of multiple digital divides as a critical issue. This includes differences between people with respect to social class, age, race, gender, education, and also differences between world regions regarding access to computers and the Internet and having the ability to take advantage of their possibilities. As such, these authors claim that not all of us have equal opportunity to participate in the online public sphere, so the possibility of excluding particular groups, classes or regions is prominent in the online public sphere. The latest annual report (2019) by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) revealed that the number of Internet users in the Kingdom reached over 30 million in 2019, which represented about 96% of the total Saudi population (MCIT, 2019). Young adults, who make up 50% of the Saudi population, have been reported as the largest age group in the country who are the most adopting of the Internet and social media (Information Telecommunication Union ITU, 2020).

To conclude, from the stories discussed above, it is evident that a number of the young women in this study attributed significance to governmental campaigns as a venue for them to overcome their inactivity as well as to remind them to do some sports during the day. A number of participants also credited non-governmental, grassroot campaigns in particular as a way through which they were able to challenge cultural obstacles and social norms concerning women's sports in Saudi Arabia. I also discussed how sportswomen and social media influencers, through their visibility online and as forms of digital activism, can raise public awareness of PA and sports, and how they are particularly able to open up Saudi society to the idea of women's sports. However, as also discussed, some participants were sceptical about the role of online campaigns, sportswomen and social media influencers when it comes to their participation in sports and PA. Discussions related to individuality, family, Saudi social norms, friends, interest in sports, age and opportunities of access are believed to influence Saudi young women's understandings of digital campaigns targeting women around PA and sports.

6.3. Understandings of Saudi Society's Responses to Digital Campaigning Targeting Women Around Physical Activity and Sports

In the following section I further explore Saudi women's understandings of digital campaigning by exploring their observations of Saudi society's responses to online campaigning focused on PA and sports. According to the study's participants, the Saudi public's comments on online campaigns and sportswomen vary broadly. Participants observed that a dominant majority of women's comments are positive, in comparison to those of men. For example, Atheer, 20 and Serene, 23, members of a university sports association, talked about how women show great tolerance of online grassroots campaigns, and they give encouragement and motivation for such campaigns to continue, as reflected below:

When it comes to online grassroots campaigns, there are usually positive comments and negative comments...The positive comments especially by women, all revolve around encouragement. They say, please continue, we support you and keep going (Atheer).

People in this matter are divided into two parts, positive people and negative people. Of course, the positive people, especially women, always support each other and try to put a footprint to increase awareness of the importance of sports among people (Serene).

Sarah, 25, a member of a university sports association, reflected on how Saudi sportswomen are perceived by the public. Sarah noted that there is a large number of people, particularly

women, who speak positively about Saudi sportswomen. They see that Saudi sportswomen are crucial in educating about the importance of sports:

I see that we are a group of women who support sportswomen, and we are always happy that we are developing. Saudi sportswomen are helping to increase the awareness of the importance of sports among women in particular (Sarah).

According to the participants, although online campaigns and sportswomen are generally well-received by the Saudi public, particularly by women, some criticise them. For example, Sarah, 24, not a member of a university sports association, discussed how some online commentators are far from happy about the types of clothing that Saudi coaches wear on social media and consider it inconsistent with the teachings of the Islamic religion, which urges women, in particular, to be modest and covered, as she asserted below:

Their clothes are not covered and not comfortable for the eye...I see that their clothes are not in line with the teachings of the Islamic religion, which ordered us to be modest and concealed (Sarah).

Amira, 21, a member of a university sports association, is another participant in this research who reflected on the types of comments Saudi sportswomen receive online. Amira narrated witnessing how some people disapproved of the type of clothes that Saudi sportswomen wear online. They attributed the reason behind this to the fact that their clothes were tight, transparent and incompatible with the culture of a country such as Saudi Arabia, as she explained below:

People comment saying that your content is showy, meaning that you only want to expose your body to the public, you are wearing skimpy and tight clothes that show the body. This is not permissible for you as a Saudi woman...I support some comments about clothes. Honestly, the biggest problem I have is their clothes; I always have a problem with it. Their clothes are always inappropriate in training, they are uncomfortable, I cannot focus on exercises as I do not like their clothes. I don't like to wear them, because their clothes are very tight, transparent. It is not permissible for them as Saudi women to do that. They should respect their culture and their family (Amira).

In the same vein, Dalia, 21, a member of a university sports association, said the following:

Negative comments will be more on the clothes. For example, they say: your clothes are immodest, tight and short...Honestly, I cannot tell you that it [clothing] is personal freedom because it falls under the framework of religion. I also see that clothing is also considered an identity for women in Saudi society...The difference between Saudi society and Western society are specific ideas in this aspect. Just because you grew up a certain way does not mean that you follow it all the time but there are certain things that are considered to be a part of the Saudi identity and I do not think it is possible that they will reach the stage of influencing it...These trainers, even though they are Saudi, do not represent the view of the majority in our society and express the view of the Saudi girl who practises sports...I do not think it is possible for them to reach this stage of influencing me (Dalia).

Dalia discussed how some people spoke negatively about the clothing Saudi coaches wear on social media and they considered such clothes as inappropriate. In her statement, Dalia talked about how clothing is not only related to the Muslim identity but is also linked to who we are as Saudi women. This, according to Dalia, is what makes us different from other societies, in particular Western societies. Dalia went on to emphasise that these trainers, even though they are Saudi, do not represent the view of the majority in Saudi society. They express the view of the Saudi girl who practises sports so that it would not be possible for them to reach the stage of influencing her opinion especially when it comes to issues related to clothing.

If some women, like Sarah, Amira and Dalia, were accepting of such comments and rejecting the type of clothes that online sportswomen, in particular, Saudi women, wear on social media, they attributed the reason behind this rejection to the fact that their clothing does not represent their identity as Muslims, it also related to who they are as Saudi women. Other participants, however, had a different opinion on this and contradicted the aforementioned views. Ola, 23 and Amjad, 21, members of a university sports association, for example, showed an acceptance of the types of clothes that Saudi online sports women wear on social media. As Saudi young women, they did not see a relationship between clothing and their identity as Muslims or as Saudi citizens. Instead, they relate it to personal freedom, for them to choose the most comfortable clothes when they practise their sports, as they reflected below:

I disagree. I see that my identity is not expressed in clothes. Clothes express my personality, but when I go to a sport, I will wear comfortable clothes. When I go for a walk, I will wear comfortable clothes for walking, and I see that it is supposed to be permissible for me to wear appropriate clothing for the sport

that I do. This has nothing to do with the Saudi identity or the identity of a Muslim woman, but only with the sport that I practise (Ola).

I do not have any objection to their clothes. I mean, those sportswomen who wear modest clothes are free, and those who wear immodest clothes are also free. I see that this is personal freedom before anything. I do not have the right to judge a person or control a person's clothing, and I see that personal identity prevails over social identity or Islamic identity. When I wear indecent clothing, this does not mean that I represent the Saudi girl. I am still Saudi, but I represent myself...I do not represent thoughts and society (Amjad)

Other young women, like Darren, 20, a member of a university sports association, offered further insight into the types of comments people write online, particularly around women's sports. These young women pointed to the Islamic religion, noting that some online commenters are not happy with online grassroots campaigns because these campaigns are not considered acts of Muslim women. They draw the attention of men towards them and as a result, they may cause congestion and chaos in the street, as Darren stated below:

They say that what you do is a mockery, why do you do this, and they start to blame us. They say these are not the acts of a Muslim woman. This is really a shame. This is forbidden. Whatever you do will draw men's attention to you and cause congestion and chaos (Darren)

Similarly, Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association and Atheer, 20, a member of a university sports association, said:

...There are also people in opposition, and most of them are men...Frankly, I always like to be neutral, and I do not like the method of objection, or link between their objections and the Islamic religion as these men do on social media. When you object, the objection must be logical. Religion is not a place for us to throw everything into. Islam is easy. It is not true that when you see a scene that you do not like, you say that it is forbidden in Islam. It is not forbidden for one to exercise (Rima).

...The negative comments have no basis of truth. Why do they say this is forbidden? Did I do something wrong? Why do they include religion in everything that is wrong? Religion has not prevented me from playing sports.

On the contrary, it encourages a person, whatever their gender, to play sports (Atheer).

Rima and Atheer discussed how some people, mostly old men, speak negatively about online grassroots campaigns linking their objections to Islam. Despite their position within these religious discourses, these young women, as was clearly shown in their narratives in comparison to Darren's statement, resisted such comments and they did not see women's actions in these campaigns as being contrary to the teachings of Islam. These young women believe that Islam as a religion is not a problem, as it does not forbid anyone to practise sports. On the contrary, Islam encourages any person, regardless of their gender, to play sports. I reflected upon the role of Islam in women's sports in more detail in Chapter Five. The results I found here are similar to those in that chapter where I showed that many women in this study believed that Islam is not against the participation of women in sports. Islam, in fact, is always supportive, encouraging both sexes to take up sports and PA.

In conclusion, what should be noted here, based on the data that was given by young participants in this research, is that there is an important gender awareness gap in Saudi Arabia regarding online campaigns and online sportswomen. While a dominant majority of women were optimistic about them and praised them for their help in increasing the level of awareness on the importance of sports among the Saudi public in general and women in particular, men, on the other hand, expressed quite conservative views. As discussed, the participants reported how some online commentators were not happy about the types of clothing that Saudi coaches wear on social media, and they attributed the reason behind their disapproval of such clothing to the fact that their clothes were not in accordance with the teachings of the Islamic religion, as well as with the culture of Saudi Arabia. Some participants discussed how some people, mostly males, speak negatively about online grassroots campaigns and they resist these campaigns for religious reasons. As emphasised above, the young women in this study respond differently to these types of online comments. Some of these young women accept such comments and other women challenge them.

6.4. Concluding Discussion

This chapter explores how Saudi young women interpret the impact of different forms of digital campaigning targeting women, focused on PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. In particular, it explores their understandings of the role of online sporting campaigns organised by governmental and non-governmental organisations, online sports and fitness personalities and social media influencers.

There is no doubt that the distinctive features of social media have provided new tools and tactics to increase awareness, disseminate information, establish events, empower each other and mobilise as well as advocate for individual and collective social change (Clark, 2015; Page | 186

Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Carstensen, 2013). Social media has enabled new modes of participation, which can be used to increase the visibility of sportswomen and social media influencers and as forms of digital sports activism, through which they can challenge dominant stereotypes and cultural gender norms and create social change concerning women's sports (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b).

In line with existing literature, the results suggest that online sporting campaigns, whether organised by governmental or non-governmental organisations, online sportswomen and social media influencers were critically important for the young women in this study in different contexts. The participants, through governmental campaigns, were able to throw off their inactivity and laziness, as such campaigns also acted as a reminder for the participants to do some sports, especially when they were busy with other things during the day. Furthermore, the participants were able, through non-governmental grassroots campaigns in particular, to challenge Saudi social norms, particularly about practising sports in public spaces, as well as to encourage them to feel brave enough to follow their sporting ambitions. Moreover, the participants also mentioned how sportswomen and online influencers, through their visibility online, have been able to open up Saudi society to the idea of women's sports and to change many of the widespread myths and misconceptions around women's sports. However, as the findings also revealed, there were some participants in this study who were specifically doubtful about the benefits of online campaigns, sportswomen and social media influencers. They questioned the role they would play in their PA opportunities and their ability to change Saudi ways of thinking about women's sports. Discussions related to factors such as the culture of Saudi Arabia and Islam, among other things, which were reported by the participants, play a key role in their understandings of digital campaigning focused on women around PA and sports.

The culture of Saudi Arabia has been considered one of the most conservative and religious in the Islamic world. In a country such as Saudi Arabia, culture and religion play vital roles in shaping people's attitudes and behaviour and in defining their norms, values and activities (Al-Saggaf, 2004). As such, the daily practices of the Saudi population are profoundly impacted by these establishments-social rules and also some Islamic teachings. To begin with, the collectivism of Saudi society revolves around the idea that a woman represents not only herself but also her entire immediate and extended family. The behaviour of women will therefore affect the reputation of their family as well as, in some cases, that of the tribe to which they belong. Therefore, if any actions by women are considered inappropriate, they will bring shame and dishonour to the entire family (Guta and Karola, 2015). On the other hand, the rigidity of social norms in Saudi Arabia is especially visible in the strict segregation of men and women, which is considered a religious as well as social and cultural duty. This system of segregation dictates that women are not supposed to be in contact with men who are not their relatives (Al-Saggaf, 2004; Almakrami, 2015). Baki (2004) highlighted the fact that in the country, it is generally felt that the purpose of these restrictions on women's mobility is important to protect them and reflect on family honour (Baki, 2004). To Saudis, family honour and reputation are critical and apply primarily to the female members of the family (Al-Saggaf and Weckert, 2011). For example, if a woman is in contact with a man who is not a relative, and without any legitimate reason, the family's honour and reputation would suffer (Al-Saggaf, 2016). The policy of male-female segregation in Saudi Arabia has led to the development of women-only public spaces. In these women-only public spaces, women can carry out activities that are considered by them and for them, while still reinforcing the barriers separating men and women (Van Geel, 2016).

That being said, it is not surprising to find out that there are many participants in this study, as in the case of Sarah, Amira, Dalia and Darren, who were strongly influenced by the processes of cultural identity within their Arabic cultures; they acknowledged their community and religious expectations of what is the appropriate behaviour for Saudi Muslim women living in a country such as Saudi Arabia-this is particularly related to their dress codes and their behaviour in public. Regarding dress codes, within this study, Sarah, Amira and Dalia, among other participants, showed a rejection of the types of clothing that Saudi coaches wear on social media. These participants believed that because these coaches are Saudi and Muslim, they should behave in a certain way. They should respect their culture, their family, as well as their religion, and they are not supposed to wear such clothes, particularly on social media, as these clothes are incompatible with the culture of Saudi Arabia and with the teachings of the Islamic religion.

In relation to the policy of male-female segregation, the results suggested that there are many participants in this study, as in the case of Darren and Dalia, who were in doubt about grassroot sporting campaigns that were designed to encourage women to practise sports in public spaces. These young women advocated for the need for such campaigns to consider Saudi social norms in terms of finding women-only public places where they, as women, can practise their sports freely and also away from males.

On the other hand, the findings also revealed that there are some young women, as in the case of Ola and Amjad, who challenged the boundaries of their Arabic identity; they, on the contrary, operated in a more detached way from the values of their cultural group. These two participants were in conflict with their community and with the religious expectations of what is the appropriate attire for Saudi women. They, as Saudi women, did not find the clothing

that Saudi trainers wear on social media inappropriate and they considered the issue about clothing to be more related to personal freedom where people, women in particular, are entitled to choose the sports clothes that are the most comfortable when they practise their sports.

The focus group results also suggested that some participants in this study, as in the case of Rima and Atheer, gave greater importance to their *religious* identity than their *cultural* identity. By choosing to identify with Islam, these young women were able to reclaim the fact that what women in online grassroots campaigns are doing (i.e., playing sports in public) is not the wrong thing to do because Islam as a religion does not forbid such behaviour. Islam, on the contrary, encourages any person, whatever their gender, to practise sports and PA (Walseth, 2006; Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995; Kahan, 2003; Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Walseth, 2015).

To conclude, the study illustrated how factors such as culture and religion play a vital role in shaping Saudi women's understandings of digital campaigning on issues of PA and sports. However, as discussed above, the young women's stories also reflect that their understanding is not totally defined by these factors, rather, they exercise their individual agency in ways which enable them to counter the influence of these factors. Some of them, in their arguments, operated in a more detached way from the values of their cultural group, and they challenged their community and religious pressures and expectations. Other participants, on the other hand, put more weight on their religion than their cultural identity. This in return, provides them with a space for action, which shows that the idea of women practising sports in public has become more acceptable to them because Islam encourages such behaviour.

In the next chapter, I will move on to talk about Saudi women's everyday social media practices; within this, I will explore the most used social media platforms; the average time spent daily, as well as the most common reasons for using such platforms. In addition, this chapter will also explore Saudi women's experiences with social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen, particularly around issues related to feminine beauty ideals and dress codes.

Chapter 7. Everyday Social Media Practices and The Role of Social Media Influencers, Celebrities and Sportswomen in Shaping Understandings of Femininity and Dress Codes

7.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Two, in recent years, social media has continuously gained popularity worldwide, including in Saudi Arabia. This medium has brought new realities to life in Saudi Arabian society in general, and to Saudi women in particular, especially considering hierarchy is significant in such a society. Guta and Karola (2015) noted that social media can provide Saudi women with space to access information that might otherwise be restricted by cultural, political and local barriers. It can also offer them an opportunity for networking not viable otherwise (Guta and Karola, 2015). Moreover, digital media has played a critical role in enabling Saudi women's voices to be heard, to share opinions and struggles, as well as promote the social issues they regard as significant (Abdullatif, 2013; Hurley, 2019). A key aspect of this is their engagement with PA and sports (Elouazi, 2018; Gustafsson, 2017; Lysa and Leber, 2018; Baker, 2016).

Within the sociology of sports scholarship, various research projects have examined how celebrity athletes and sportswomen use social media as activist tools, both in Muslim as well as non-Muslim countries (e.g., Rahbari, 2019; Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). Within the Muslim context, the research has looked at the way in which celebrity athletes and sportswomen use social media to challenge dominant portrayals of their lives as victims of their "backward" cultures and therefore in need of "saving". For women in Ahmad and Thorpe's (2020) study, social media was found to be a valuable tool for

showing aspects of their lives, and resisting stereotypes, and a myriad of cultural gender norms regarding women's sports. When Muslim sportswomen represent aspects of their sporting lives on social media, they do so by giving careful consideration to their cultural backgrounds (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020). Yet, despite these often highly visible forms of activism and the growing body of literature focused on women's social media activism on sports, little research has yet explored Saudi women's personal experiences of celebrity athletes and sportswomen on issues related to PA and sports.

It is important to mention that this chapter is based entirely on the analysis of semi-structured interviews with 11 participants. As detailed in Chapter Four, these participants were first interviewed in Phase One (focus groups). During the focus group discussions, they said they had exposure to some forms of digital campaigning around PA and sports and therefore, they were invited for follow-up interviews using the method of scroll-back for a more in-depth discussion on their personal experiences of social media use and of digital campaigning around PA and sports.

In the first part of the chapter, I will explore Saudi women's everyday social media practices: the most used social media platforms, the average time spent daily on these platforms, as well as the most common reasons for using them. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss, in more specific terms, Saudi women's experiences with social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen, particularly around issues related to feminine beauty ideals and dress codes on social media.

7.2. The Everyday Social Media Practices of Saudi Women

Overwhelmingly, the young participants in this study described how social media have become integral in their daily lives. During the interviews, it became clear that most of my participants spent between 5 to 6 hours daily on a range of social media platforms, in particular, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat.

Within my own research, when I asked the young women about their social media usage, Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association, for example, stated that she used social media, particularly WhatsApp, Twitter and Snapchat, on a daily basis, for around 5 hours, and typically spent the most time on such platforms in the evening. In Rima's statement, we can also see how she estimated the time spent on each platform through her usage of App Tracker on her iPhone, as she explained below:

I use social media almost daily, we can say 5 hours, at separate times in the day. Sometimes in the morning when I wake up, but most of the time I use social media in the evening...Yes, there is an App programme on the iPhone, through which you can learn the time you spend on the mobile. I know that because at the beginning, I used to enter and see where my time was consumed, and I found that most of my time now is spent on WhatsApp and some other time is spent on Twitter or on Snapchat (Rima).

Similarly, Shahrazad, 21, not a member of a university sports association, is another young participant in this study who talked about her use of social media, in particular of Snapchat. She described how she often keeps up-to-date with posts on Snapchat through its notification feature, as she said below:

I use social media every day for approximately 6 hours per day...I use YouTube,
WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat...On Snapchat I check the contents. I see

the posts and videos from people I have added to my account and I always find about them when I get a notification on my phone so I can go and check their posts and videos, and sometimes I ask via direct message about anything related to a picture or a video these people share online...I have a programme on my mobile that calculates the time I spend on social media...See this is the programme...Can you see how much time? The programme states that I have used social media for about 6 hours today (Shahrazad).

Other young women, such as Glu, 19, not a member of a university sports association, provided further insight into the way they engage with social media. Glu reported the following:

I use Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, but YouTube is the most popular. I use YouTube mainly to watch a lot of videos. I use these sites every day, we can say 5 to 6 hours a day...Personally I use these platforms after I have finished what I am supposed to do, whether this is helping my mom or after finishing my studies...No I don't have a programme, I calculate the time myself. I can calculate the period of my sitting with my cell phone before lunch, how many hours. After that, I go to cook some food with my mother. Then calculate the period of my sitting with the cell phone, and then I go to watch TV. This is the method I use for calculating my hours on social media (Glu).

These stories, discussed above, provided an important insight into how social media is used by the young women in this study; the accounts provide details of their most popular social media platforms and the average time they spend daily online. Given their high levels of

engagement with social media, it is worth exploring, as it will be discussed next, the reasons that drive these young participants to use these platforms.

In relation to understanding the motivation to use social media, existing literature, whether published in Western countries or in the Eastern world, have shared common interests in understanding why users, in particular a younger age group, have adopted and utilised social media platforms. In their quest to answer such a question, they identified a number of motives behind their usage (e.g., Liu, 2010; Aljasir et al, 2017; Alwagait et al, 2015; Yusuf et al, 2016; Askool, 2013). In these studies, the overall motivations include communication and establishing relationships, social engagement and speed of feedback, as well as to obtain information.

Within my study, while some of the participants appreciated their use of social media, in particular WhatsApp, as an opportunity to communicate with their friends, as well as collaborate with fellow students, other young women spoke about how social media, particularly Instagram, was useful for obtaining information, provided them with a space where they can go and see photos and videos related to their interests in beauty, fashion, as well as healthy food and recipes, as reflected by Ghada, 21, not a member of a university sports association and Ohoud, 23, a member of a university sports association, below:

Most of the time, I just browse the content on social media...On WhatsApp, I use it to chat with my friends and also to see news related to my specialty, which is law, and I always share it with my friends so that we can start discussing it (Ghada).

I am one of the people who checks the content more. I am not one of those people who upload videos or comment on the contents...In general, I see

photos and videos of the things that I am interested in, like beauty, fashion, food and healthy recipes...This is on Instagram (Ohoud).

The interviews revealed that social media was also the main platform for many of these young women, who spoke passionately about their personal experience of its use, and learnt of many sporting activities, especially those targeted at them. They said they would never have learnt of these without the help of social media sites such as Twitter, as can be gleaned from Lama's, 23, a member of a university sports association, story:

Yes, there is a video on Twitter about a women's football club. This is the first official women's football club in Saudi Arabia. I think this video is produced by the Saudi government to let women know about this club...When I saw the comments on this video, many people liked the idea and got excited and said: 'how can I register and how can I start training with you?'... Social media is the reason people know about this club and it contributes to spreading knowledge of this club to a larger segment of Saudi society, in particular to women (Lama).

In the same vein, Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association, narrated how posts on Twitter are important for her because through such posts, she receives up-to-date news about women's sporting activities and advice on how to find sports clothes that are suitable for her as a veiled woman. Rima said:

If you want to change anyone's mind, it must be done through social media. People on social media make advertisements for their products and they do that because they know that they will be able to reach people quickly.

Currently, I will show you something from my Twitter account, it is an organisation for women. Every period they post about races held for women in particular. On such posts, there are advertisements to encourage women to start registering for sports practice with them...One of my friends always goes running with people whom she follows on her Instagram account...Likewise, posts on social media tell us where we can get sports clothes that are suitable for veiled women in particular. No one searches all the time on websites, but we see posts on social media and benefit from them (Rima).

Glu, 19 and Shahrazad, 21, not members of a university sports association, other young participants in this study, said the following:

I am one of the people who like to see a lot of useful publications, and of course I see sports content, especially on YouTube...I watch a lot of videos from people I follow...Check out this video of a non-Saudi sports coach named Sarah and she has a YouTube channel...Here she talks about the importance of sports in maintaining health...And here she also talked about abdominal exercise and tried to explain the technique about it...I think these things are useful for me because through the audio and video, I can apply the exercise in the right way (Glu).

Their content is very useful and helped me change my life...This is a YouTube video from an influencer whose named is Heba Ali, she is of Kuwaiti origin, but lives in America...The video talks about the importance of sport for a pregnant woman, see, she is pregnant and practising sports...Videos like these change my concept of sports and pregnancy, pregnancy did not prevent her from

exercising, and on the contrary, it shows that sport is useful for the pregnant woman (Shahrazad).

Glu talked about how she used social media, YouTube in particular, to watch videos of the people she follows online, particularly by a non-Saudi coach, and how this online content is highly significant for her knowledge and understanding of issues related to health and sports. Similarly, Scheherazade talked about how YouTube content from a Kuwaiti influencer was useful for her as it helped change her perception of the idea of women's sports, especially during pregnancy. I discussed how social media content, especially that provided by sportswomen and social media influencers can be seen as a pedagogical tool which helps to raise young women's awareness and knowledge of PA and sports and particularly can change many of the widespread myths and misconceptions around women's sport. I give more detail in Chapter Six. What I found particularly interesting here is how the young participants are directly engaging with social media as a method of self-education i.e., they use these sites to find out information related to health and sports. This also illustrates how social media information gleaned from different platforms is used to improve one's own understandings of feminist issues such as playing sports during pregnancy.

In summary, it has been shown how social media platforms were popular among the young women in this study; as stated, they were active on platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, with an average daily time spent on such platforms ranging from 5 to 6 hours. These young participants embraced these platforms to meet a wide range of their needs, including communicating with their friends and collaborating with their fellow students online, as well as seeing content related to their interests in beauty, and fashion as well as about healthy food and recipes. Moreover, the young women also used

such platforms to find out information about sporting activities, especially those targeted at women in Saudi Arabia and also to acquire general information related to health and sports.

The participants reported, as discussed above, how social media influencers and sportswomen contributed to their understandings of issues related to health and sports, therefore, it is worth finding out, as it will be discussed in the following section, if social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen play a role in the way that these young women understand issues around feminine beauty ideals and dress codes online.

7.3. Experiences of Femininity and Dress Codes Through Social Media Practices: The Role of Social Media Influencers, Celebrities and Sportswomen

In Chapter Six I presented and discussed data related to Saudi women's understandings of digital campaigning around PA and sports; there it became evident that the young participants involved in the study often focused on issues related to femininity, body and dress codes, so in the following sections I am going to further explore these issues in more detail, specifically focusing on Saudi women's understandings of feminine beauty ideals and dress codes in relation to social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen. For clarity, these three labels are drawn from the interviewees' responses when I asked them about their personal experiences of digital campaigning.

7.3.1. Feminine Beauty Ideals

The aim of the present section is to explore how Saudi young women interpret feminine beauty ideals that are promoted in the digital space, particularly by social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen. During the interviews, the participants were asked to identify social media personalities they consider to have the most characteristics of feminine beauty.

Ghada, 21, not a member of a university sports association, for instance, found that Layali, a Saudi influencer who has an interest in beauty, fashion and hairstyle, was "the most beautiful girl". As she explained below:

I see Layali, a Saudi influencer, as the most beautiful girl...As for her body, she has a curvy body, a thin belly; she has muscles, but not muscles that result from eating a lot of protein, she has natural muscles that appear after normal exercises. This is beautiful. I see this as a feminine look (Ghada).

Ghada continued and mentioned the following:

Honestly, I don't see women having to build huge muscles and go for exercises such as weightlifting. Do you see this influential figure? I don't remember her name now, but she is American. She lifts weights about 100 kilos. I think that it does not benefit her as a woman, the most important thing is that she maintains her health and fitness, and it is not important to build huge muscles like that. A woman's body must be flexible and soft, not hard and large, meaning hardness and a large body are the characteristics of a man's body...I once showed my cousins a picture on my Instagram account of an influential woman with many muscles, and they did not like her shape. My cousins said that this influencer might look good in the gym while she wears sports clothes, but if she wears normal clothes for women, a dress, for example, her appearance will not be good, she will be like a man wearing a dress. It is not a feminine appearance; I agree with them actually (Ghada).

Ghada has a definition of feminine beauty, a body which maintains a particular physical appearance; she has an image of a curvy woman, with a thin belly, most importantly, having

what she defines as "natural muscles". In Ghada's narrative, the concept of "natural muscles" and "normal exercises" is related specifically to diet. On this subject, Ghada considers that if a woman takes in a lot of protein in her diet, she will end up not having "natural muscles" in her body. If, on the other hand, she does not eat a great deal of protein, her muscles will have a natural look, as a result of regular exercises. Another important point we can draw from Ghada's statement is the idea that the number one priority for any woman is to maintain her health and fitness; this implies a body that must be flexible and soft. These attributes are incompatible with large, strong muscles.

This view was echoed by Darren, 20, a member of a university sports association, who said:

Yes, I like an Egyptian celebrity, called Yasmine Sabri. She is graceful, her waist is thin and she has muscles, but not the muscles that are similar to men which require taking protein for them, but the light and natural muscles that I love in Yasmine Sabri. I see this as one of the signs of beauty in her (Darren).

It is notable that Darren again rehearses the idea of "natural muscles" and the narrative about a high-protein diet. Furthermore, she continued her argument by asserting:

I do not like this kind of sport [she is referring here to weightlifting and boxing].

I am not with people who practise them...Look at this video about an Iraqi woman carrying weights and winning the gold medal, showing it is a beautiful sport, but I think that it is not suitable for women. It should be for men, but as a female who practises such sports, it is not feminine look, from my point of view...And also such kind of sports is considered a danger to a woman's health. I heard information that a woman who wants to lift weights must do a hysterectomy operation first...This information is also confirmed by a Saudi

coach who once told me that these exercises are practised by people who are not concerned with their womb or do not have a problem about not having a baby. For any woman who has had a hysterectomy operation, it will not be a problem for her if she lifts weights (Darren).

Darren also noted the unsuitability of sports such as weightlifting and boxing on women's feminine appearance. She also believed in the danger of practising such sports on women's health, in particular, in their wombs. Darren said that practising such sports is a problem for women's wombs because, as a Saudi coach told her, it will affect their ability to have children; if a woman wants to do such sports, she needs to have a hysterectomy operation first.

Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association, is another young woman in this study who argued for 'natural muscles' and references the same Egyptian celebrity as Darren, discussed above, to illustrate this:

I do not like this scene [she is talking here about a photo of an influential woman who has muscles in her body]...I don't like the muscles in the girls...I am one of the people who believe in the idea of "preserving your nature", meaning that if you born a girl, you must be elegant, you must be feminine...You must preserve that nature, which is femininity, that God created for you...I feel that boxing and weightlifting make a girl more masculine...A girl must maintain her shape, and her body must not transform to be like the body of men and be full of muscles. The body may have a certain percentage of muscle, but it should not be more than necessary, I don't think when women have huge muscles that would be a sign of feminine beauty...Look at this woman, she is an Egyptian celebrity, Yasmine Sabri, who is interested in sports and sometimes she puts

her photos out when she is in the club as a story in Snapchat...she is beautiful, now she is wearing a dress that does not show that she has muscles, but when she wears sports clothes, it appears that she has muscles, but she has natural muscles not many (huge) muscles, which I see as beauty (Rima).

Rima's narrative stresses the importance for women of preserving their "nature" which in her definition is associated with God. In Rima's mind, God created women to preserve their natural state and they should not engage in activities (e.g., boxing, weightlifting) that will depart from the definition of ordinary and what is seen as their nature as women. Also, when Rima is defining an idea of the feminine body, she refers to limits of muscularity in a woman's body; she considers that a woman's body should only have a certain percentage of muscles, which does not exceed a defined limit. Rima believes that when women wear sports clothes, they will appear to have natural, healthy and feminine muscles.

If some women like Ghada, Darren and Rima associated a feminine appearance with a curvy body, a thin waist and most importantly with muscles in a softly feminine shape, other women, such as Amjad, 21, a member of a university sports association, had a different view. Amjad appreciated the apparent shape of the muscles, meaning that the muscle is prominent and clear, as this is considered a symbol of feminine beauty.

There is an influential figure, a Saudi coach named Thuraya...I see her body is very thin and you feel that it's tight and attractive...Also, it does not contain much fat...Her body is beautiful because it has muscles. I consider muscles a beautiful and eye-catching thing and I consider them an extra aesthetic thing for women (Amjad).

Amjad highlighted the following:

But many people I know, for example my family, would not agree with me because they are still on the previous standards of female beauty, that the body is curvy and that there is a thin waist. They also believe that a female must be physically weak and her body does not need to have muscles, as it is for men only. I do not agree with this. I certainly hope to have big muscles. For sure my family will not like that, and they may say to me you are a man and not a woman, you are a tomboy...But this thing will not affect me personally, I can inspire other people with the idea that there are other standards for female beauty, and that having big muscles is not an ugly thing and does not transform you from a female to a man, but I appreciate that I am a female no matter how I look (Amjad).

As in her example, Amjad equated muscles with aesthetics and she, herself, did not mind having big muscles. However, according to Amjad, many people in her society, her family, in particular, would not encourage her to such an idea. Reflecting the views shared by other interviewees discussed above, Amjad's family believed that a muscular body is the characteristic of a man's body, but not of a woman's. I reflected upon the role of the family in relation to women's sports participation in more detail in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I discussed how some families discouraged their daughters from practising sports such as lifting heavy weights and this is due to the belief that such type of sport is not suitable for their nature as women and it will cause them to have muscles like those of men, and therefore no one will marry them.

It is interesting to note that Amjad was one of the few participants in this study who consistently expressed counter-cultural narratives, especially when it comes to the issues of

the place of women in general and of women's sports in particular. We could speculate the reason that might drive Amjad to hold such views is something to do with her tribe. Amjad is a member of a Southern tribe in Saudi Arabia which is well known to be extremely traditional. During my interview with her, I felt that as a woman she was not happy with most of the traditions and customs that are widespread within her community, especially pertaining to women and their rights, and she wished to see some radical changes in such traditions and customs. This might have given Amjad a different set of ideas from the other young women in this study.

Other participants, such as Dalia, 21, a member of a university sports association, provided further insight into how the young women in this study understand feminine beauty ideals on social media. For instance, Dalia stated the following:

Previously, I used to take it [she is talking here about the standard of feminine beauty] from the public like anyone, meaning from family, friends, from study or from media...Their perception of female beauty has nothing to do with sports. They think female beauty exists by nature, that it is from God and if God created you in this way, then you are beautiful. However, in terms of sport, practising sport will not guarantee you to have a beautiful body. A beautiful body is a gift from God, God gave it to women naturally...However, in the last 3-4 years that I began to notice that the standards of beauty are very different, and I began to notice that every woman is beautiful if she takes care of herself, meaning that you are beautiful, but you can make a difference — it is a matter of whether a person cares or not...Look at this coach, her name is Ghada, she is from Kuwait, and I see her as beautiful. I do not mean facial beauty, but I

think that sports helped her highlight the most beautiful things about her in terms of her health, in terms of her hair and in terms of her body. So, if women practise sport and look after their bodies and watch their diets then this in return will add to their feminine beauty (**Dalia**).

According to Dalia, female beauty depends on women themselves when they practise sports and monitor their daily intake of food, these will add value to their feminine beauty. By framing female beauty as something that depends on women themselves, Dalia resisted the perception of female beauty that exists within her society, which attributes it to a gift from God. In such a statement, it can be clearly seen that young women like Dalia clearly construct an idea of feminine beauty portrayed on social media through a postfeminist discourse of individualism, choice and empowerment and with an emphasis on the need for constant self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline (Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Camacho-Minano et al, 2019; Baer, 2016).

Together, these perspectives provide an important insight into the way that the young women in this study interpret feminine beauty ideals that are promoted by influencers, celebrities and sportswomen on social media. In this regard, some young women, in their narratives, associated the feminine appearance with a body that is described as curvy, has a thin belly and most importantly has muscles that exist in a soft feminine shape so that women do not lose their femininity. While others appreciated the prominent muscles in women's bodies and they regarded this as a sign of a feminine look. Other young women found the matter is all about working on the body i.e., women have to take the responsibility of caring for their body by playing sports and monitoring their diet, which will help them achieve a feminine look.

As discussed above, and as described by some of the participants, the types of clothing that social media influencers wear played a role in the participants' understandings of feminine beauty ideals, therefore dress codes arise as a significant theme that needs to be expanded in greater detail in the following subsection.

7.3.2. Dress Codes

Within this subsection, I present and discuss data related to the way young women in this study understand dress codes that are depicted online by celebrities, social media influencers and sportswomen. Participants in this study spoke positively about the types of clothing that online non-Saudi celebrities wear. Glu, 19, not a member of a university sports association, for example, is among the participants who looked at the issue from a practical side. In her narrative, she demonstrated that she did not have a problem with the clothing of these online non-Saudi celebrities. According to her, their clothes serve a purpose such as helping burn fat and controlling sweating, as she explained below:

Watch this video of a non-Saudi celebrity, named Yasmine Abdel Aziz...She has an Instagram account named, @yasminabdelaziz_...Her clothes are from international brands, such as Adidas and Nike. Her clothes are suitable for sports, which help burn fat and do not cause sweating of the body. She can't wear normal clothes, for example, a pyjama, when doing sports, she will definitely wear something like that [she is referring here to leggings and T-shirt]. She will wear what she feels will suit her body and exercise in those clothes, as the goal is sport at the end (Glu).

Some women, such as Amjad, 21, a member of a university sports association, also voiced acceptance of the types of clothing that social media influencers, particularly non-Saudis, wear and she related this to personal freedom. She commented:

See this fitness influencer...No, she is not Saudi. Her name is Massy Arias. From her Instagram account - the language of the account, location, and environment in which she took the photos, it appears that this is not the Saudi society. I think she is American. She is wearing shorts and a sports bra. I do not have an opinion about whether to accept or reject her clothes. I see it as personal freedom. I feel that her clothes are normal. I have no problem with it. I am sure that there are people who will refuse this type of clothing. They think that they are revealing clothes and not covering clothes, I do not feel that they cause me any problems, I do not reject these clothes (Amjad).

In the same vein, Rawan, 22, a member of a university sports association, stated the following:

There is a girl called Abeer Al-Shatti. She is not Saudi, but rather a Kuwaiti living in America...Her clothes are good and everything is fine. Her clothes are normal. Look at her clothes on her Instagram account, she is wearing short leggings and a sports bra. Such clothes are suitable for sports, nothing wrong with them, but for example, with regard to the dress, it is normal because she lives outside Saudi Arabia and she is used to their style. Not the same culture as here so it is okay to wear such clothes (Rawan).

Rawan is another young woman in this study who showed positive attitudes towards dress codes that are presented by a non-Saudi fitness and sports trainer, particularly by a Kuwaiti

woman living in America. Rawan attributed her acceptance of this Kuwaiti influencer's clothing to the fact that she lives outside Saudi Arabia, in the US in particular. I reflected upon this idea around the role of the place, especially when it comes to issues of clothing, and how this influences the participants' sports opportunities in more detail in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I discussed how some participants found practising sports in public in a country such as Saudi Arabia difficult because of society's restrictions on clothing, i.e., wearing the traditional abaya which limits their sports participation in public spaces. However, if they choose to practise sports outside Saudi Arabia, they have more freedom to choose the clothes that suit the exercise they practise the most and this will secure more opportunities for them to practise sports in public.

While many of the young women with whom I spoke in this study were pleased with what social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen wear in the digital space, some were questioning the degree to which their bodies are visible, particularly on social media. Shahrazad, 21, not a member of a university sports association, is an example of the young woman in this study, who said:

Look, this is a foreign celebrity, Jillian Michaels, she is American. She has a YouTube as well as an Instagram account. I don't like her clothes, she almost does not wear anything, and all her body is visible...I did not like her images because they are too revealing and I do not see how these images serve the sport...I see that what she is wearing is inappropriate and you do not feel that the purpose of this video is educational such as wanting to help other women and empowering them through her exercises. You feel that it is pornography.

It aims to attract followers to the page; I do not like to see such images in my account (Shahrazad).

Shahrazad's thoughts emphasise the contradictions often found within versions of celebrity feminism that the participants regularly encounter in the digital space. Shahrazad's discussion of the American celebrity includes issues of sexualisation. During the interview, I asked her whether she saw this as an example of feminism and, as clearly shown in her statement, she struggled to make sense of how these sexualised images can represent "feminism". As discussed earlier, feminism is a concept that is difficult to define precisely but is generally broadly understood as a way to campaign for women's rights, including, for example, their right to equal pay, and better educational and job opportunities as well as an end to physical and sexual violence (Mendes, 2011). However, in my study some young women like Shahrazad challenged postfeminist discourses that often emphasise female nudity as an indication of gender equality and liberation, actively questioning this logic through their own understandings and experiences of digital feminism (Gill, 2007; Keller and Ringrose, 2015).

Furthermore, many of the young women in this study, with the exception of only one, showed a rejection of the dress codes demonstrated by Saudi social media influencers, sportswomen and celebrities, particularly on social media. Rima, 23, not a member of a university sports association, is an example of a woman who linked her lack of acceptance to Islam. In a study conducted among Indonesian Muslim women (Beta, 2016), Rima found the types of clothes that Saudi influencers wear, a bra and short pants, on social media, are inappropriate as she believed that such clothes fail to qualify as Islamic dress, as she reflected below:

There is a Saudi influencer, named Model Roz. I saw her for the first time on Snapchat, and I saw her sporting activity, then I added her on Instagram...There are people like this famous influencer, she is Saudi, I do not like the way she dresses. She wears a bra and short pants...Because this thing that she wears is not in our Islamic religion...I am more interested in this aspect of religion...I think this is not suitable for her being a Muslim girl and of a conservative religion like Islam (Rima).

Rima continued her argument by asserting:

I did not see any character that could represent the Saudi woman whom we are used to and know...Unfortunately, these famous Saudi influencers do not represent Saudi women. They only represent themselves and the people who like them and the kinds of clothes they wear, I don't think they are Saudi. This is not racism, their clothes are not compatible with our religion. They do not appreciate the customs and traditions that we are accustomed to. And I don't know whether what they do can be seen as freedom, or whether they have different customs and traditions from ours. If non-Saudis see that and ask whether all Saudis are like this, I will tell them no, we are not (Rima).

Rima continued her argument by emphasising that even though these social media influencers are Saudi, it is a mistake to assume they can represent Saudi women as according to Rima, they only represent themselves and the groups who like them and who like these kinds of clothes they wear.

I found it interesting to observe the way that Rima suggests that the only way to be Saudi and Muslim is through following mainstream thought in Saudi Arabia, particularly in relation to

clothing, in which the customs and traditions of Saudi Arabia should be respected, and no one has the right to change these customs and traditions. If, on the other hand, someone comes up with something new or different from the group, Rima is hesitating to consider this as freedom, and they can be dismissed as non-Muslim and non-Saudi.

This view was echoed by another participant, Sarah, 20, a member of a university sports association, who argued:

Look, this Saudi influencer is called Lama. She has an Instagram account called @Lamaworkout...I used to see her posts and the videos that were uploaded by her on her Instagram. I was denouncing the types of clothes she wore, especially because she is Saudi. One of the clothes that appears in her page is very tight and she is wearing shorts also and I can see her stomach...Currently, there is no woman that represents Saudi women. All those Saudi influencers now have taken the Western perspectives in their ideas and the way they dress. I am one of the people who have many influencers on my account. Until now, no one could represent the Saudi woman with her veil and clothes. This influencer that I told you about, her clothes are not the clothes of the Saudi Muslim woman, maybe because she lives in Germany, so she became imprinted with the nature of the Germans and was affected by them more (Sarah).

Sarah, as shown in her narrative, seemed to have a similar viewpoint to that of Rima as she stated that the clothes that Saudi social media influencers wear online are not compatible with their identities as Saudi Muslim women. Sarah believes that this is due to the influence of Western society.

Dalia, 21, a member of a university sports association, also questioned the types of clothes that Saudi social media influencers are promoting on social media:

For the Saudis, the owner of this account is the same as the one in the photo. This is a Saudi fitness influencer, who has a Snapchat account called g-gym. At first, she did not show herself or her body, but suddenly she began to do so and started wearing these clothes [she is referring here to leggings and a crop top] ... Because she is Saudi and from the tribe [the word tribe she is using here refers to descendants of Bedouins¹³], she is not supposed to appear in these clothes on social media and in front of people. A lot of men are going to see them, there is no privacy...I do not have a problem if you wear it in a closed club or in sports venues, but I have a little problem in terms of showing it publicly as if it is normal and your excuse is that you exercise...People who wear such clothing on social media do not have a separator between private life and public life...I see that it is not right and I want a separator. The limits of my actions stop at the boundary of my home, and the first thing I think about, when leaving my house, is that I must pay attention to every move I do (Dalia).

Dalia found the clothes Saudi online influencers wear on social media unacceptable especially as these influencers come from a tribe in Saudi Arabia. However, Dalia did not see any problems wearing such types of clothes in closed places such as women-only gyms. Dalia

¹³The Bedouin people are nomadic Arabs inhabiting the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula, Levant, and North Africa. The word "Bedouin" is taken from the French version of the Arabic word "Badawi," which translates to "desert dweller". They are divided into several clans or tribes but share the culture of herding goats and camels. A large number adheres to the Islamic religion (Wynbrandt, 2010).

described those who appear on social media wearing such clothes as those who do not differentiate between what is meant by public and private life. The argument made by some women, like Dalia, is also highlighted by scholars such as Ravn et al (2020); Beta (2016); Boyd (2010) who argue that nowadays, in today's society where digital media play a growingly important role in everyday lives, the lives of those who are connected to the Internet are influenced by or entangled in social media. Interactions that are a result of social media have blurred the boundaries between offline and online, creating what is called "cyber-urban space". At the same time, they have blurred the boundaries between what is regarded as public and private, which in turn can affect the ability of users to have a sense of control over information about themselves and their own visibility (Beta, 2016; Boyd, 2010; Ravn et al, 2020). While social media have blurred the boundary between public and private, it is also important to acknowledge that Muslim women living in an Islamic country such as Saudi Arabia have a conception of public and private that is in itself influenced by societal and cultural norms that are different from those most commonly in place in Western societies (Ravn et al, 2020) (see Section 5.2.1). This clearly can be seen in the young women's narratives in this study. Dalia here is an example of these young women, who considered social media as public places and therefore unacceptable for Saudi influencers to appear in such clothes where there will be a lot of people, in particular, men who are going to see these clothes. Dalia, on the other hand, considered places such as women-only gyms which are regarded as public spaces in other non-Saudi communities, as private spaces, as these places are based on the segregation between men and women and, therefore, it is appropriate for these social media influencers to appear in such clothes in these places. I reflected upon this idea, particularly on how Saudi women understand the context of public and private spaces in more detail in Chapter Five. The results I found here are similar to those in that chapter where I

showed that many women in this study considered spaces that are either occupied by family members, such as homes or those that are sex-segregated, such as women-only gyms, schools or universities to be private. Whereas places outside the family home i.e., the street and urban localities were seen as public spaces. This distinction between private and public spaces has an important role in how Saudi women in this study experience PA and sports. Most of the participants agreed that PA and sports should be primarily carried out in private spaces as these allow them to have control over time, the cost of fitness equipment and most importantly, over who will be present during their exercise or sports activities.

Indeed, from the examples presented above, it is clear that young women in this study had different viewpoints on the dress codes that are presented on social media, particularly by celebrities, social media influencers and sportswomen. Some of the young participants considered the issue from a practical side in which they did not see any problems with what non-Saudi celebrities wear online. Other women found that the choice of clothing is a form of personal freedom, and they did not have an opinion as to whether to accept or reject what non-Saudi influencers wear on social media. Other participants linked the issue to the place in which it occurs since these non-Saudi sportswomen are living outside Saudi Arabia so there is nothing wrong with what they wear on social media. However, some women were sceptical about the practice of wearing revealing clothing online, in particular, they criticised the types of clothing that Saudi social media influencers wear and they believed that such types of clothing are not compatible with their religious and cultural identities so that is not appropriate to wear them, particularly on social media.

7.4. Concluding Discussion

In this chapter, my primary focus is to explore Saudi women's everyday social media practices and discusses the role played by social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in informing their understandings of femininity and dress codes on social media.

The results revealed that, overwhelmingly, the young participants in this study saw social media as an integral part of their daily lives and as reported, they were active on various platforms. The findings also suggested that these young women embraced social media for multiple reasons, including to research information about sporting activities, especially those targeted at women in Saudi Arabia and to acquire general information about health and sports. These results align with much-existing literature which shows the comparatively high use of social media by young Saudi Arabians (Radcliffe and Lam, 2017; Salem, 2017; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019). The findings also align with the reported reasons for the extensive social media use by Millennials, including communication, establishing relationships, social engagement and speed of feedback, as well as for information seeking (Liu, 2010; Aljasir et al, 2017; Alwagait et al, 2015; Yusuf et al, 2016; Askool, 2013).

In relation to the role played by social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in Saudi women's understandings of femininity and dress codes, the findings demonstrated a great diversity. As regards feminine beauty ideals, the results illustrated how some of the participants related how it is important for women to maintain a particular physical appearance, an image of a curvy body, with a thin belly. And, very importantly, according to these young women, there are set limits to the muscularity of a woman's body; they agreed on the idea of a certain percentage of muscles, which does not exceed a permitted, defined limit. Also, these young participants associated feminine beauty with God, and they highlighted the importance for women to preserve their "natural state"; they should not play

sports that are not commensurate with the nature that God created for them. The findings also revealed that there were some participants in this study who appreciated the apparent shape of the muscles in women's bodies and they found that having muscles in a woman's body is not something ugly and will not transform their body to be like a man's body. In contrast, they believe a woman will still remain a woman, no matter how her look changes. Furthermore, the findings showed that there were some women who believed that female beauty depends first and last on women themselves, and they must take control of their bodies by playing sports and monitoring their diet; by doing this, they will add value to their feminine beauty.

With regard to dress codes, the results demonstrated that there were some women in this study who showed an acceptance of the types of clothing that in particular non-Saudi celebrities, social media influencers and sportswomen wear online. In this regard, some women, in their stories, considered the issue of clothing from a practical point of view, in which they did not see any issues with what non-Saudi celebrities wear on social media. Other participants regarded their choice of clothing as a personal matter and felt it was not their role to accept or reject what non-Saudi influencers wear on social media. Others expressed the idea that since the sportswomen are not from Saudi Arabia, nor living there, there is nothing wrong with their clothes. The findings, on the other hand, also revealed that there were some participants who, in their discussions showed discomfort about the degree to which the bodies of the non-Saudi celebrities are visible and they criticised their practice of wearing revealing clothing online. The results also demonstrated that the women in this study, with only one exception, condemned what social media influencers, sportswomen and celebrities, particularly Saudis, wear on social media; they found their clothes to be incompatible with their roles as Saudi Muslim women. Other participants, as the results

showed, questioned the types of clothing that Saudi social media personalities wear on social media. They particularly drew on discourses of privacy, describing those who wear such clothing on social media as those who do not differentiate between what is meant by public and private life.

That being said, one of the most striking aspects of the results discussed above is the way that Saudi young women engage with social media influencers, sportswomen and celebrities and with postfeminist digital discourses in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways, both celebrating as well as problematising such discourses. Within the above analysis, I have examined how some young women, through their interaction with social media influencers, sportswomen and celebrities, framed feminine beauty exclusively as a personal choicesomething which depends first and last on the women themselves. The body, for these young women, is seen simultaneously as a source of power and as requiring constant surveillance, monitoring and discipline. As is consistent with postfeminist discourse, it is clear that such framings disregard social-cultural and religious influences when it comes to issues around femininity (Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Camacho-Minano et al, 2019; Baer, 2016). On the other hand, as the results showed, there were some women who expressed ambivalence at postfeminist discourses, they particularly highlighted some aspects, the most important of which are sexualisation and its relationship to gender equality and women's empowerment. Within the results, I found that some young women, through their engagement with discussions about social media influencers, sportswomen and celebrities' clothing, were sceptical about the degree to which their bodies are visible online and they, as young women, struggled to make sense of how such sexualised images can be understood as a way to empower other women when it comes to sports (Gill, 2007; Keller and Ringrose, 2015).

Another interesting point that can be drawn from the findings is concerned with how some young women reflected on the idea of social media, they highlighted what it means to be both private and public on social media and how this, in return, influences their ability to have a sense of control over their information and their visibility online. Within this study, I examined how some young women, especially in their discussions about Saudi social media influencers' clothing, thought that wearing such types of clothing on social media was not acceptable because for them social media is considered as a public space and there is no guarantee of their privacy. However, the same young women did not see any problems with wearing the same clothing in places such as women-only gyms, as these places are considered private spaces based on the segregation between men and women; this will guarantee them their privacy. Through such findings, we can understand how women in Saudi Arabia understand the context of public and private, particularly on social media. This is something that existing Western literature has yet to examine, especially in the context of Muslim youth in which religious and social contexts, identities, and practices play a significant role in their understanding of what constitutes public and private spaces on social media (Raven et al, 2020; Beta, 2016; Baym and Boyd, 2012). Therefore, such findings are highly significant.

These findings provide evidence of the role that social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen play in Saudi women's understandings of issues around feminine beauty ideals and dress codes on social media. Consistent with the literature, the results showed how the young participants, through engaging with social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen, were able to challenge dominant stereotypes and their religious and cultural gender norms concerning issues related to femininity, body and dress codes (Rahbari, 2019; Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b; Camacho-Minano et al, 2019; Baer, 2016; Gill, 2007). However, as discussed above, these young women's stories also Page | 220

reflect that their understanding is not totally defined by the influence of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen; rather, discourses around religion, culture, nationality and privacy on social media, among other aspects, as reported above, played a vital role in how these young women perceive issues around feminine beauty ideals and dress codes on social media (Al-Saggaf, 2004; Almakrami, 2015; Guta and Karola, 2015; Ahmad, 2019).

Chapter 8. Discussion and Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

The objective of this qualitative study is to explore Saudi women's understandings and experiences of sports, PA and related forms of digital campaigning. In this final chapter, I discuss the findings presented in chapters 5-7 through a theoretical lens. Section 8.2. discusses findings relevant to RQ 1: How do Saudi women understand and experience PA and sports? Do they see any potential challenges in engaging with them? Section 8.3. focuses on RQ 2: How do Saudi women understand digital campaigning targeting women around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia? Section 8.4. reflects on findings addressing RQ 3: How and why Saudi women use social media? How do Saudi women understand the role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes? Section 8.5. considers the study's limitations and the recommendation for further research. Finally, Section 8.6. presents policy recommendations.

8.2. Understandings and Experiences of Physical Activity and Sports in Saudi Arabia

The research has brought to light the ways in which ideas of place, Islam, traditions and society's beliefs, family influence and structural issues, and the different intersections of these issues, relate to the understandings and experiences of PA and sports by Saudi young women. In Chapter 5, I enumerated several key findings based on the analysis of the focus groups and interviews.

One significant finding to emerge from this study is that the participants clearly delineated private and public spaces. For them, private spaces are defined as any space either occupied only by members of the women's immediate family (e.g., the home) or which is segregated

(e.g., women's only gyms, schools or universities). The participants generally agreed that PA and sports are best practised in private spaces, such as women-only gyms, as these spaces allow them to have some element of control over who will be present during their exercises; they are able to practise their sports away from the gaze of men. This finding is consistent with Evans's (2006) study of PA and the rate of sport participation among girls and boys aged 13-16 living in the UK, which argued that the issues of control and surveillance over pupils' bodies are important, in order to understand why some girls did not enjoy sports in certain spaces, such as in school, as compared to those outside the school, e.g., women-only sporting spaces. It is clear that the young women in Evans's (2006) study perceived public spaces in a more negative way; they thought of them as allowing control and surveillance over their bodies. In contrast, this study also found that there are other women who understand public spaces as those that are outside the family home i.e., street and urban localities, as places for enjoyment and belonging and find them as spaces for social activity that encourages relationships with other people (Azzarito and Hill, 2013). For instance, some of the participants described places, such as the street, as a space for them to walk and smell clean air and communicate with their trainer, as well as socialise with other people who also practise sports.

Participants had varied views on the practice of PA or sports in public. Some considered walking to be more acceptable than other PA or sports activities; this was often due to their religious and cultural traditions. However, the results also showed that there were participants who challenged their religious expectations, and found it acceptable to practise other sporting activities, alongside walking, in public spaces, especially if they wear clothing that meets the religious requirement of modesty (Palmer, 2009; Thorpe et al, 2020).

Issues of religion and privacy also intersected in women's views on mixed-gender or segregated practices. Several participants recognised a need to be segregated from men when they take up sports and this was often due to their religious and cultural beliefs, as well as their concerns over issues related to their privacy (Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Pfister, 2010; Cortis, 2009; Al-Saggaf and Islam, 2015; Al-Saggaf, 2016). However, the findings also showed that there were participants who did not mind joining sporting events in mixed-gender environments because they can do it in a way that is compatible with Islam.

Participants' views on the role of Islam were varied. On the one hand, many participants considered that Islam has positive attitudes towards women's sports; this was often due to its health and recreational aspects (Kahan, 2003; Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Walseth, 2015). Yet, for some of them, Islamic codes of conduct, requiring modesty in dress and avoiding mixed-gender sports activities, presented barriers to participation. During this study, I observed that there was a great diversity in the way that Saudi women interpret these religious requirements which has led to different experiences of PA and sports (Kay, 2006; Ahmad, 2011). The participants supporting traditional interpretations of Islam reported that neither the hijab nor gender segregation raised any barriers to their participation in sports as their adherence to these religious requirements stems from their identity as Muslim women. On the other hand, the participants taking a secular position were unconcerned about these religious requirements and believed that participation in sports is a human issue, with Islam having no influence. The findings also revealed other interpretations of Islam which seem to function as a barrier to some in their participation in PA and sports as these interpretations are related to power relations within Saudi Arabian society. These participants demonstrated their belief that Islam as a religion is not against women's sports, but the issue is rooted in the way that Saudi Arabian society considers playing sports in public or going to the gym as

inappropriate behaviour for women. This strategy of separating religion from tradition has given the participants more space for action which is also highlighted in the work of Walseth (2006); Eisenstadt and Giesen (1995).

The research also illuminated the way notions of femininity impinged on ideas about PA and sports. Several participants believed that being a woman in the Arabic culture implies being a wife, and mother, with much time spent at home caring for their husbands and other family members; they also felt encouraged to maintain a particular physical appearance and to show no interest in PA and sports. These notions of femininity were also found among other women within Western studies. In the USA and Poland, where women are often socialised to fulfil the traditional roles of housewife and mother, sport is still viewed as a male activity (Levant et al, 2007; Jakubowska and Byczkowska-Owczareks, 2018). However, in the current research, several participants showed their individual agency in opposing ideals of femininity within their cultures, and have created alternative ideals where they can practise sports and have a muscular and stronger body, while also maintaining a feminine appearance (Walseth, 2006). The study also shed light on the important role of the family in either enabling or challenging the participants' PA and sports opportunities. The study found that a number of families of the young participants facilitated their participation in PA and sports; these included providing support, playing together, providing transport, coaching as well as planning a healthy meal with them (Kenz et al, 2012; Stride and Flintoff, 2017). However, the thesis also showed how some parents were not happy with their daughters' wish to take up sports. I described above how the notions of femininity have played an important role in the participants' experiences of PA and sports, and how these have factored in parents' attitudes towards their daughters' sports participation. The research found that the participants

recognised how gendered expectations that are placed on them by their parents influenced their participation in sports. These women described how their parents became deeply concerned when they practised sports, in particular lifting heavy weights, as they felt that such sports will affect their health, and their wombs, and will prevent them from becoming a mother in the future-which is considered the most suitable role for women. Such parental expectations surrounding the role of women have also been experienced by Muslim girls and women living in Western countries, in Britain in particular (Kay, 2006). However, the findings also demonstrated how the participants exercised their agency in challenging the influence of their family in their quest to be physically active. Within that, they questioned the gendered assumptions that were held by their parents, where sport is considered a muscular activity and therefore not suitable for them (Jakubowska and Byczkowska-Owczarek, 2018). Instead, they developed their own opinion and found ways to be physically active.

The research also provided insight into the impact of limited sports facilities and the high membership fees of clubs on the experiences of PA and sports. Several participants expressed their strong concerns about the lack of facilities and the high membership fees of the clubs in the areas where they live and saw these as important factors influencing their decision whether or not to practise PA and sports. This finding aligns with some Western (e.g., King et al, 1992) as well as with some Eastern studies (e.g., Donnelly et al, 2018) which also report issues around access to facilities. However, the findings also illustrated that several participants emerged as active agents and critically engaged with these factors, finding their own solutions e.g., creating closed places (i.e., gyms in their homes) that enable them to participate in physical activities they are keen on (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Ali et al, 2020).

In summary, these findings add to the growing body of research (Sfeir, 1985; De Knop et al, 1996; Walseth and Fasting, 2003; Walseth, 2006; Khan et al, 2012; Walseth, 2015) that shows how Muslim girls and women encounter several barriers when it comes to their PA and sport participation, that these barriers are often related to socio-cultural and religious traditions, as well as structural limitations. These findings also align with those of existing research (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Ali et al, 2020; Knez et al, 2012; Stride, 2016; Jiwani and Rails, 2010; Palmer, 2009; Thorpe et al, 2020; Walseth, 2006) that has shown how young women express agency in drawing on alternative discourses in constructing their identities and navigating power relations. For instance, research by Palmer (2009); Thorpe et al (2020) showed how women demonstrated their agency in navigating the influence of hijab discourses through their resourcefulness and creativity in creating appropriate places such as their homes and female-only environments where they enjoy PA and with no need to worry about patriarchal reprisal when they remove their clothing.

These reflections resonate with debates within intersectional feminism scholarship, as key to exploring young women's understanding and experience of self and identity (Stride, 2016; Baer, 2016). Intersectionality values "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Stride, 2016, p. 681). It acknowledges the significance of individuals' multiple identities and the broader social structures while recognising how these different levels intersect to lead to power relations, difference and discrimination (Stride, 2016). In the context of this study, it can be observed how young women in Saudi Arabia face different constraints when it comes to the issues of participation in sports and PA. Issues related to gender and culture of Saudi Arabia intersect in the way that young women understand what constitutes public and private spaces

and how some parents restrict their daughters' sporting opportunities. However, young women actively engage with these constraints. The study's participants discussed the way they challenge religious expectations and gendered assumptions, showing acceptance of the practice of sporting activities in street places, and resistance to or negotiations with family influence.

To conclude, this study shows that Saudi young women's understandings and experiences do not arise simply as a result of gender, religion, or financial, social and cultural background, but of different combinations of these, with which they negotiate to produce a complex array of potential outcomes.

8.3. Understanding Digital Campaigning Which Targets Women on Issues Concerning Physical Activity and Sports in Saudi Arabia

An important focus of this study is to explore how Saudi young women interpret the impact of different forms of digital campaigning focused on women's PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. This thesis examines their understandings of online campaigns organised by governmental and non-governmental organisations, online sports and fitness personalities and social media influencers. As discussed in Chapter 6, the analysis of the focus groups has presented several key findings.

Participants' views on the significance of online campaigns, sportswomen and social media influencers were varied. Several participants described the ways online governmental campaigns encourage them to become more active, while also reminding them to exercise especially when they are busy doing other things during the day. The study also found that several participants reported that online non-governmental, particularly grassroots

campaigns provide them with opportunities to empower each other to push back social barriers, particularly concerning the practice of sports in public spaces, as well as to follow their sports ambitions (Clark, 2015; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Carstensen, 2013). The findings also showed that some of the participants recognised the importance of the online content that was shared by Saudi and non-Saudi sports and fitness personalities, to increase their knowledge and information about sports. Similar results have been reported by young people in the work of Goodyear et al (2019), where social media sites, especially those provided by sports and fitness women and men, were viewed as credible sources of information because these people 'know what they are talking about', and they are considered as experts. Furthermore, the current study found that the participants discussed how online Saudi and non-Saudi sportswomen dispelled many of the widespread misconceptions and myths around women's sports, for instance, in terms of practising sports during pregnancy and/or during menstruation as it will harm their health.

On the other hand, the results of this research revealed that several participants questioned the promises of online campaigns, sportswomen and social media influencers; some factors, among others, individuality, friends, age and opportunities of access and religious and Saudi cultural norms, played a key role in their understandings of digital campaigning. Several participants questioned the benefits of online governmental campaigns, and they were convinced that the matter first and foremost is related to individual motivation (Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Camacho-Minano et al, 2019; Baer, 2016). Moreover, a number of participants found the role that their friends played in their participation in sports is more important than that of online non-governmental campaigns. The argument made by these women is also highlighted in previous work (Earl and Garrett, 2017; Haciyakupoglu and Zhang, 2015; Carty and Onyett, 2006; Clark and Themundo, 2003) where it is argued that social media

has an important role in many political and social movements; however, the crucial role of trust, and the mechanisms which build trust, are still unknown. Other participants in this study were convinced that non-Saudi social media influencers will resonate well among younger generations, particularly those from the nineties onward as these generations accept new ideas much more easily and they often do not value their traditions and Islamic rules as much as those from older groups, or pre-nineties generations (Clark, 2016; Sassi, 2005; Van Deursen and Van Dijk, 2014; Leurs, 2016; Warf and Vincent, 2007). Above, I discussed how religious and cultural issues are believed to influence the young participants' understandings and experiences of PA and sports, and how these issues are still significant when it comes to their appreciation of digital campaigning. The study found that several participants showed a rejection of the type of clothes that Saudi sportswomen wear on social media, and they attributed the reason for such disapproval to religion and culture. Additionally, the thesis found that several participants were in doubt about the online non-governmental sporting, grassroot campaigns in particular that encouraged women to practise sports in public. These women particularly stressed the importance of considering Saudi social norms, as well as the teaching of the Islamic religion, in finding women-only spaces where women can play sports freely and away from males. Yet, despite these factors, this research recognised the agency of women in finding ways to navigate the influence of these factors; for instance, some participants showed an acceptance of Saudi sportswomen's clothes, and they were convinced that women have the right to choose clothes that are most appropriate to their sports. While other participants welcomed women's actions in these online grassroot campaigns (i.e., playing sports in public), and did not find anything wrong because Islam as a religion does not forbid such behaviour for women.

In summary, these findings align with earlier observations (Graham et al, 2016; Clark, 2015; Hurley, 2019; Kaufman and Wolff, 2010; Carstensen, 2013; Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b) which argued that social media platforms, in recent years, have become powerful spaces for activism, as they have provided women activists with new opportunities to increase awareness, disseminate information, establish events, empower each other, as well as to advocate for individual and collective social change concerning women's sports. While aligning with previous research that has shown the importance of socio-demographic and geographical factors in influencing Internet usage across social groups (Clark, 2016; Sassi, 2005; Van Deursen and Van Dijk, 2014; Leurs, 2016; Warf and Vincent, 2007), this study also showed how young women in Saudi Arabia seem to exercise their individual agency in ways that enable them to counter the influence of these factors. For instance, there were some young women who challenged the boundaries of their Arabic identity; they, on the contrary, operated in a more detached way from the values of their cultural group. They, as Saudi young women, did not see any problems with what Saudi trainers wear on social media and they related the issue of clothing to personal freedom where women can choose the sports clothes that are the most comfortable when they practise their sports.

My findings show the importance of exploring how contextual aspects contribute to the way young women understand digital campaigning around PA and sports. The proponents of this contextual framework (Wolfsfeld et al, 2013) have argued that when examining the role of social media in social change, politics comes first analytically and chronologically, as it would be a mistake to attempt to understand how social media contributes to collective action without considering the environment in which it operates. As discussed above, the findings showed how some factors, including some aspects of the culture of Saudi Arabia and Islam, Page | 231

and their intersections play a key role in Saudi women's understandings of digital campaigning. However, the results also showed how several young women expressed agency: they actively challenged cultural and religious expectations, being convinced that women have the right to choose clothes that are most appropriate for their sports. However, others self-identified more with their religious identity than their cultural identity, finding it more acceptable to practise sports in public because Islam does not see any problems with such behaviour for women.

As such, the findings from this study show the importance of applying a contextual approach, demonstrating how individuality, peer pressure, age, opportunities for access and religious and cultural norms impact the experience and understanding of digital campaigning. In fact, my findings add to scholarship on digital activism because they shed light on these factors in relation to young women in the Saudi Arabian context, which is something that has not yet received much attention.

8.4. Social Media Practices and The Role of Social Media Influencers, Celebrities and Sportswomen in Relation to Femininity and Dress Codes

This research provides a set of findings relating to the everyday social media practices of Saudi young women, as well as their experiences of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen, particularly around issues related to feminine beauty ideals and dress codes on social media. As highlighted in Chapter 7, an analysis of the interviews has presented several key findings.

Social media was an important part of the participants' daily lives, they spent several hours per day on various platforms and they used social media for a variety of reasons some of

which related to health, sports, beauty and fashion. This is consistent with much existing scholarship, specifically Eastern studies (Al-Haidari, 2016; Alhamadi, 2017; Radcliffe and Lam, 2017; Salem, 2017; Thorsen and Sreedharan, 2019)

Another interesting aspect of the results is the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways the Saudi young women in this study interpreted the feminine beauty ideals and dress codes that were promoted by social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in digital spaces. In relation to feminine beauty ideals, several participants showed how for them it is important for women to maintain a particular physical appearance; an image of a curvy body, with a thin belly, most importantly, has muscles that exist in a soft feminine shape so that women do not lose their femininity. The findings also revealed that several participants appreciated the prominent muscles in women's bodies, and they considered this as a feminine look. Additionally, factors such as Islam and Saudi social norms have played an important role in the way the participants understand digital campaigning around PA and sports, it appears that these factors are still relevant when it comes to their understanding of femininity on social media. The research found several participants who stressed the importance of preserving the "nature" that God created for women, and that women should not play sports that are not commensurate with "their nature". Furthermore, the study found several participants who believed that a feminine look means that women have to take control of their bodies by practising sports and monitoring their diet (Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Camacho-Minano et al, 2019; Baer, 2016).

Regarding dress codes, several participants considered this from a practical side, in which they saw no problem with clothes that non-Saudi celebrities wear online. The findings also showed that a number of participants linked the issues of clothing to personal choice; they did not

have an opinion on the clothing non-Saudi influencers wear on social media. In addition, the study found that a number linked the issue of clothing to place and they argued that since these non-Saudi sportswomen are living outside Saudi Arabia, there were no problems with their clothes on social media. However, the thesis also showed that the participants criticised the practice of wearing revealing clothing, particularly by non-Saudi celebrities online (Gill, 2007; Keller and Ringrose, 2015). I explained earlier how Islam and the culture of Saudi Arabia have influenced the participants' views of femininity on social media and also reported that they are still important when it comes to their interpretations of dress codes on social media. In this regard, some participants refused to accept what Saudi social media influencers, sportswomen and celebrities wear online, as their clothing was incompatible with their religious and cultural identities. These participants in particular drew on discourses of privacy, describing these Saudi personalities who appear on social media wearing such clothing as people who do not differentiate between what is meant by public and private life. This finding aligns with Ravn et al (2020); Beta (2016); Boyd's (2010) work, where they argued that interactions that are a result of social media have blurred the boundaries between offline and online, creating what is called "cyber-urban space", and the same time blurred the boundaries between what is regarded as public and private, which in turn, can have an impact on the ability of users to control their information and visibility online.

In summary, these results are in accord with studies indicating how social media, in recent years, has become a critical part of the everyday life of young users (Liu, 2010; Aljasir et al, 2017; Alwagait et al, 2015; Yusuf et al, 2016; Askool, 2013). These findings also match those observed in the work of Rahbari (2019); Ahmad and Thorpe (2020) who showed evidence of the use of social media by celebrity athletes and sportswomen as an activist tool, through which they challenge dominant stereotypes and their religious and cultural gender norms.

These results also speak to those in Ahmad's (2019) study, which explored how Saudi sports influencers are engaging with social media and found evidence of how religious and cultural relations influence the way that Saudi young women understand sports influencers in relation to issues that have to do with femininity and dress codes.

My findings also show the continuing significance of self-representation theory in enabling the understanding of how sportswomen and social media influencers use social media as a key strategy in increasing their visibility online and as a subtle, yet powerful, form of digital sports activism, through which they challenge dominant stereotypes and cultural gender norms, and advocate for social change concerning women's sports (Ahmad and Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a, 2018b). As discussed above, the findings have yielded insight into how social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen have played a role in how Saudi young women challenge religious and cultural issues in order to form a new understanding of femininity and dress codes. However, the findings have also shown how social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen contribute to the way Saudi young women negotiate, rather than necessarily challenge, religious and cultural issues in relation to their understanding of femininity and dress codes.

I turn now to talk about how Saudi young women understand what constitutes public and private spaces on social media. As discussed above, issues related to the culture of Saudi Arabia and Islam intersected in the way that Saudi young women understand what constitutes public and private. The significance of this lies in explaining the notion of public/private spaces on social media in the context of Saudi Muslim youths, where social contexts and practices contribute to their understanding of the distinction between the two places and this is

something that existing Western literature has not examined in detail (Raven et al, 2020; Beta, 2016; Baym and Boyd, 2012).

These findings show again how dynamics identified by intersectional feminism scholars work when it comes to Saudi women's understanding of femininity and dress codes (Stride, 2016; Baer, 2016). While issues of religion, Saudi social norms, and the idea of privacy on social media, among other things, intersected in the participants' understandings of femininity and dress codes, they were actively engaging with these issues and critically selecting from them and making them their own, with some of them being able to create a new understanding of femininity-that is more consistent with a postfeminist discourse of individualism, choice and empowerment (Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Camacho-Minano et al, 2019; Baer, 2016). This provides new insight into how intersectionality works in the context of Islamic states like Saudi Arabia, where cultural and societal norms are particularly restrictive of women's abilities to engage in public activities. My findings also fill a gap in knowledge about the conception of what is public and private on social media and how such a distinction influences Saudi women's ability to control their information and their visibility online.

8.5. Limitations to the Research and Recommendations

Despite the novel contribution of this study to the field, some limitations should be considered. The first limitation, or difficulty, is conducting research in the context of limited literature availability and inaccessibility of credible sources, relevant to the study's topic. For example, it was hard to find studies exploring Saudi women's understandings and experiences of PA and sports and, therefore, it became necessary to draw on the experiences of Muslim women from Western contexts, e.g., from Europe and North America. This limitation can illustrate the importance of the current study as it fills a gap in knowledge about Saudi

women's experiences of PA and sports and points to the need for further research in the context of Saudi Arabia in particular and in the Middle East in general.

Another limitation of the present study is related to the selected age group for the sample, which is Saudi young women aged between 18-25 years old (see Chapter Four). It appears reasonable and logical to select this age group as the main sample of this study since it has both practical and theoretical rationales, as has been explained in Chapter Four. However, focusing on other age groups may result in richer findings and broader conclusions concerning the understandings and experiences of PA and sports, and of digital campaigning targeting women in the field of PA and sports in Saudi Arabia. This is particularly relevant to age groups, such as those over 35, as they are still relatively heavy users of social media, and seen as an integral part of their lives (Prensky, 2001). Among the limitations is the need for researchers studying technology and society to recognise the possibility of rapid change and be aware of the speed of changes in results. This is particularly relevant to a country such as Saudi Arabia where, in recent years, the Kingdom has been experiencing dramatic changes in all aspects of life and particularly concerning the status and role of Saudi women within society. In my study, I considered all these changes and tried to update my findings where possible. However, I think further studies are needed in this area and there are many opportunities for researchers to contribute to the literature.

The final limitation that may be found in this study is related to the project being conducted in English, whereas the focus groups and interviews were conducted in Arabic, as the participants were university students living in Saudi Arabia and their preferred language was Arabic. The challenge of this limitation may be finding accurate translations for the Arabic terms the participants might use. To overcome this limitation, the back-translation and

reflective techniques could be valuable solutions to represent meanings or potential construction of new meanings in generating transcripts (Gawlewicz, 2016). I took detailed field notes (in both the focus groups and interview phases) about my interviewees concerning their behaviour and the word/phrase/utterance in their original language-specific expressions.

8.6. Policy Recommendations

Statistical data from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the health of Saudi Arabia's youth indicates that an increasing number of youths, particularly females, suffer from diabetes and obesity as a result of inactivity (Sharara et al, 2018, Al-Hazzaa, 2018). In the present study, I have explored how existing digital campaigns aimed at increasing health and well-being are experienced by Saudi young women in the country. The present study employed semi-structured interviews using the method of scrolling back (Phase Two) to explore the everyday social media practices of Saudi women. Within that, the young women embraced social media platforms to discover information about sporting activities, especially those targeted at women in Saudi Arabia and also to acquire general information related to health and sports. This finding is of great importance as it can be argued that communicating with women and exchanging information with them through social media has a great impact. The offline platforms, however, remain important. Several health studies have used the Ottawa Charter's (WHO, 1987) action areas for health promotion to promote PA among different populations (e.g., Herbert-Maul et al, 2020). The Ottawa Charter identified five action areas for health promotion, and one of these seems particularly relevant to the present study: creating a supportive environment. The policies of the Saudi Arabian government relating to the accessibility of places where women can safely practise PA and sports could

contribute to creating an environment that supports women. As the findings demonstrated, some women expressed concerns over having few or no sporting facilities open to them in the areas where they live. And they found that if there were sporting facilities, the subscription fees were very expensive. Therefore, women's PA levels could be improved by establishing public gyms for women, with minimum fees evenly distributed across the country. Meanwhile, the government could encourage private investment in female gyms, especially in areas where resources are scarce, to ensure universal access. For this to be achieved, the locations of female gyms and the prices of gym memberships would have to be regulated. Regulations on maximum and minimum fees would likely reduce the variation and high fees in Saudi Arabian female gyms.

8.7. Concluding Summary

This research has shown evidence of the role that issues of place, Islam, traditions and society's beliefs, family influence and structural issues, and the different intersections of these issues, relate to Saudi women's understandings and experiences of PA and sports. This research has also suggested that Saudi women's understandings of PA and sports is not entirely dictated by these issues, rather, they are exerting their agency in ways that enabled them to counter the influence of these issues. This research has also shown how factors such as the culture of Saudi Arabia, Islam and age and opportunities of access among other things, play a key role in Saudi women's understandings of digital campaigning focused on women around PA and sports. This research has also suggested how Saudi women exercise individual agency in ways which enable them to negotiate the influence of these factors. This research has shown how issues of religion, Saudi social norms, and the idea of privacy on social media, among other things, intersect in Saudi women's understandings of femininity and dress

codes. This research has also suggested how Saudi young women are actively engaging with these issues and critically selecting from them and making them their own, where some of them are able to create new understandings of femininity and dress codes. Ultimately, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first such study in Saudi Arabia. The study also adds to research on intersectional feminism, particularly in the Saudi Arabian context. It illuminates the way intersectionality works in shaping experiences and understandings of women's engagement with sports, PA and digital campaigning in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the study shows why intersectional feminism is important to sociological work in the Saudi Arabian context. This is an advance in the field.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Table 2: Focus Group Participants

| No | Participant Pseudonym | Age | Marital Status | Collage | Major | Year of the Study |
|----|--------------------------|-----|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Glu | 19 | Single | School of Arts | Foundation Year | 1. Year |
| 2 | Zahia | 19 | Single | School of Arts | Foundation Year | 1. Year |
| 3 | Sheikha | 23 | Married | School of Arts | Geography | 2. Year |
| 4 | Joan | 21 | Single | School of Science | Biology | 2. Year |
| 5 | Zekra | 22 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | Psychology | 3. Year |
| 6 | Bushra | 20 | Married | School of Humanities and Science | History – Tourist Guide | 3. Year |
| 7 | Shumukh | 20 | Single | Law School | Law Regulations | 3. Year |
| 8 | Areej | 22 | Single | School of Communications and Media | Public Relations | 3. Year |
| 9 | Wagd | 22 | Married | School of Science | Biochemistry | 4. Year |
| 10 | Ghada | 21 | Single | Law School | Law | 4. Year |
| 11 | Nada | 23 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | English | 4. Year |
| 12 | Shahrazad | 21 | Single | School of Communications and Media | Public Relations | 4. Year |
| 13 | Amal | 21 | Single | School of Science | Biology | 4. Year |
| 14 | Rima | 23 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | Psychology | 5. Year |
| 15 | Sarah | 24 | Single | Medical School | Medicine and Surgery | 6. Year |
| 16 | Sona | 25 | Single | Medical School | Medicine and Surgery | 6. Year |

Note: All the participants were not members of a university sports association and they were also at their early as well as their final years of their studies.

| No | Participant Pseudonym | Age | Marital Status | Collage | Major | Year of the Study | University Sports Association |
|----|--------------------------|-----|-------------------|--|---|-------------------------|---|
| 1 | Darren | 20 | Single | School of Computer Information Technology | Network Administration | 1. Year | The Sports Committee |
| 2 | Atheer | 20 | Single | Law School | Law | 2. Year | Taiba Healthy Club |
| 3 | Alaa | 20 | Single | School of Science | Computer Science | 2. Year | The Sports, Committee, Fitness Time |
| 4 | Ranad | 21 | Single | School of Economics and Administration | The Economics of Money and Financial Institutions | 3. Year | The Sports Committee |
| 5 | Rawan | 22 | Single | School of Economics and Administration | Public Administration | 3. Year | Sports Tent |
| 6 | Amira | 21 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | Psychology | 3. Year | Sports Psychology Club |
| 7 | Sarah | 20 | Single | Medical School | Physiotherapy | 3. Year | The Sports Committee |
| 8 | Serene | 23 | Single | Public Administration | Accounting | 3. Year | The Sports Committee |
| 9 | Ola | 23 | Single | School of Science | Microbiology | 4. Year | Taiba Healthy Club |
| 10 | Shawaq | 23 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | Social Work | 4. Year | The Sports Committee |
| 11 | Lama | 23 | Single | School of Science | Biochemistry | 4. Year | Sports Club |
| 12 | Sarah | 25 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | Psychology | 4. Year | Sports Tent |
| 13 | Walaa | 22 | Single | School of Science | Microbiology | 4. Year | Sports Tent |
| 14 | Dalia | 21 | Single | Law School | Law | 4. Year | Sports Tent |
| 15 | Amjad | 21 | Single | School of Communications and Media | Public Relations | 4. Year | The Sports Committee |
| 16 | Ohoud | 23 | Single | Medical School | Medicine and Surgery | 6. Year | The Medical Science Club |

Note: All the participants were members of a university sports association and they were also at their early as well as their final years of their studies.

Table 3: Interview Participants

| No | Participant Pseudonym | Age | Marital Status | Collage | Major | Year of the Study |
|----|--------------------------|-----|-------------------|--|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Darren | 20 | Single | School of Computer Information Technology | Network Administration | 1. Year |
| 2 | Glu | 19 | Single | School of Arts | Foundation Year | 1. Year |
| 3 | Rawan | 22 | Single | School of Economics and Administration | Public Administration | 3. Year |
| 4 | Shahrazad | 21 | Single | School of Communications and Media | Public Relations | 4. Year |
| 5 | Lama | 23 | Single | School of Science | Biochemistry | 4. Year |
| 6 | Dalia | 21 | Single | School of Arts | Geography | 4. Year |
| 7 | Ghada | 21 | Single | Law School | Law | 4. Year |
| 8 | Amjad | 21 | Single | School of Communications and Media | Public Relations | 4. Year |
| 9 | Sarah | 25 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | Psychology | 4. Year |
| 10 | Rima | 23 | Single | School of Humanities and Science | Psychology | 5. Year |
| 11 | Ohoud | 23 | Single | Medical School | Medicine and Surgery | 6. Year |

Note: The participants were those who have some experiences/exposure to some forms of social media campaigning around PA and sports in their own social media use.

Appendix II



Participant Consent Form (Online Focus Groups)

| Please tick the appropriate boxes | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Taking Part in the Project | | | | | | | |
| I have read and understood the project information sheet and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean). | | | | | | | |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. | | | | | | | |
| I agree to take part in the project. | | | | | | | |
| I understand that taking part in the project will include taking part in an online focus group discussion. | | | | | | | |
| I understand that taking part in the project will include being recorded audio. | | | | | | | |
| I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw. | | | | | | | |
| How my information will be used during and after the project | | | | | | | |
| I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, and email address etc., will not be revealed to people outside the project. | | | | | | | |
| I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this. | | | | | | | |
| I am aware that data collected during the study will be stored for 10 years before being destroyed. | | | | | | | |
| So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers | | | | | | | |
| I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield. | | | | | | | |
| Name of participant [printed] Si | gnature | Date | | | | | |
| Name of Researcher [printed] Si | gnature | Date | | | | | |



Participant Consent Form (Online Semi-Structured Interviews)

| Please tick the appropriate boxes | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Taking Part in the Project | | | | | | | |
| I have read and understood the project information sheet and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean). | | | | | | | |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. | | | | | | | |
| I agree to take part in the project. | | | | | | | |
| I understand that taking part in this study will involve being interviewed virtually. | | | | | | | |
| I give permission for the interview to be audio-recorded. | | | | | | | |
| I would like to opt-out from the scroll-back activity during the interviews. | | | | | | | |
| I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw. | | | | | | | |
| How my information will be used during an | d after the project | | | | | | |
| I understand my personal details such as nar revealed to people outside the project. | ne, phone number, and ϵ | email address etc., will not be | | | | | |
| I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this. | | | | | | | |
| I am aware that data collected during the study will be stored for 10 years before being destroyed. | | | | | | | |
| So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers | | | | | | | |
| I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any n University of Sheffield. | naterials generated as pa | art of this project to The | | | | | |
| Name of participant [printed] | Signature | Date | | | | | |
| Name of researcher [printed] | Signature | Date | | | | | |



Participant Information Sheet (Online Focus Groups)

1. Research project title

Female university students' understandings of digital campaigning around the topic of physical activity and sports in Saudi Arabia.

2. Invitation

You are invited to take part in a research project that aims to explore female university students' understandings related to digital campaigning around physical activity and sports in Saudi Arabia. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

3. What is the project's purpose?

There are three purposes of this research project. This research project is going to explore how do female university students define physical activity and sports. Moreover, this project will find out the challenges that may be encountered by female university students when they wish to engage with them. Finally, this project will also explore how female university students understand digital campaigning around physical activity and sports.

4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a female student at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, and your age is between 18 and 25. Also you have been chosen because you are users of social media and are interested in physical activity and sports (i.e., doing some type of physical activities whether regularly or not such as walking, running, swimming, cycling etc.,).

5. Do I have to take part?

No. it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, I will send a copy of this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form (the information sheet and the consent form that you will be given will be translated to you into Arabic-I will translate them by myself). But if you decide to withdraw from the project, you can do so at any time and you do not have to give any reasons or justifications for withdrawing.

6. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

This research project involves taking part in the online focus group discussion. In this discussion, we will talk about your understandings of physical activity and sports and of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports. This focus group will involve 4 female university students at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah. This focus group will be conducted online. Therefore, I will ask the participants to choose the best time for them all and also encourage them to decide whatever online platforms they prefer such as Skype and Google Meet etc., for our discussion. The duration of the focus groups will be expected to last between 60 and 120 minutes.

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Taking part in this research project will require you to commit some of your time-to complete focus groups. However, there are no anticipated disadvantages or any physical or psychological harm for you. In case of potential questions, which make you uncomfortable, I would like to inform you that you can abstain from answering any of them or withdraw from the research without any justification for your decision at any time and if you choose to do this that your data will be destroyed and not be used in the study.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Each participant who will agree to participate in the focus group stage will receive a 100 SAR (20.00 GBP) Jarrir bookstore voucher as a token of appreciation.

9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications that arise from this project. Any data collected about you will be only accessible to the researcher

and her supervisors. At the start of the focus groups, the participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality of all discussion that will take place. In this case, the participants will be asked to agree verbally not to disclose anything that is mentioned during the focus group to anyone outside of the group and not to mention to anyone else the names of those involved in the group with them.

10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The discussion of the focus group will be conducted in Arabic then transcribed and translated into English. All the recordings during the focus groups will be stored onto my University of Sheffield Google Drive space or the University Server where they will be kept password protected and they will be accessed only by the researcher. After finishing the use of the transcription, and translation, they will be stored for 10 years before being destroyed. The findings of the results will be reported in Ms. Nuha Almohammadi's PhD final dissertation. And we also hope to report the findings at conferences and publish the findings in an academic journal. In order to share with you a summary of this research, I will ask you for permission to retain your contact email address. As mentioned above, it is important to note that your individual data will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications that arise from this project. Your data also will be anonymised, and I will use data which is pseudonymised.

11. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

During the focus group discussion, you will be recorded audio only. All your focus group recordings will be only used for analysis and no other use will be made of them without your written permission. All your individual data will not be made accessible to anyone but to my supervisors and will be sorted for 10 years before being destroyed.

12. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being carried out at the University of Sheffield and is funded by the Saudi Arabian Government-King Abdul-Aziz University.

13. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

14. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This research has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the sociological studies department. The University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

15. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

If you have any concerns about this research project during the focus group, you can stop whenever you wish. If you want to make a complaint about this research project then you can contact researcher (Nuha Almohammadi) directly through the her email: nalmohammadi1@sheffield.ac.uk or you may contact her supervisors Dr. Stefania Vicari, <u>S.vicari@sheffield.ac.uk</u> or Dr. Kate Weiner, <u>K.weiner@sheffield.ac.uk</u> in the first instance. If your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Head of of Sociological Studies Professor the Department Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk who then will escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

16. Contact for further information

Researcher: Nuha Almohammadi, email: nalmohammadi1@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone UK: 07459873412, international number: +966563636889 and university address: Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield Building, Northumberland Road, Western Bank, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK, S10 2TU.

In case you have any question, you are kindly invited to contact my supervisors: Name: Dr. Stefania Vicari, email: s.vicari@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone: 01142226452 (external), 26452 (internal) and university address: Elmfield, LG13. Name: Dr. Kate Weiner, email: k.weiner@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone: 01142226491 (external), 26491 (internal) and university address: Elmfield, LG22.

17. A note on general data protection regulation (GDPR)

As this research has the potential to touch on sensitive topics relating to body image and health, we want to let you that we are applying the following condition in EU law: the use of your data is necessary for scientific or historical research purposes. Personal data (i.e., name and address) is collected for the purpose of contacting individuals to arrange for an interview

to take place, and sharing findings with them, once the study is complete. Data will be processed by the researcher. Personal data provided by research participants who have consented to the study, will be retained to enable the researcher to share findings with you at the end of the study. Your personal data will be destroyed after this point. Any data that will be shared during a research interview will be anonymised during the transcribing of the interview. Anonymised data will be stored for 10 years after the study is complete.

Thank you for reading this far and considering taking part in this research project. If you would like to participate then please complete and sign the consent form, which is attached.



Participant Information Sheet (Online Interviews)

1. Research project title

Female university students' understandings of digital campaigning around the topic of physical activity and sports in Saudi Arabia.

2. Invitation

You are invited to take part in a research project that aims to explore female university students' understandings related to digital campaigning around physical activity and sports in Saudi Arabia. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

3. What is the project's purpose?

There are two purposes of this research project. This research project is going to investigate how and why female university students use social media. Moreover, the project also aims to find out how female university students understand the role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes on social media.

4. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a female student at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, and your age is between 18 and 25. Also you have been chosen because you are users of social media and are interested in physical activity and sports (i.e., doing some type of physical activities whether regularly or not such as walking, running, swimming, cycling etc.,). You have been also chosen because you have some experiences of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports.

5. Do I have to take part?

No. it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, I will send a copy of this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form (the information sheet and the consent form that you will be given will be translated to you into Arabic-I will translate them by myself). But if you decide to withdraw from the project, you can do so at any time and you do not have to give any reasons or justifications for withdrawing.

6. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

This research project involves taking part in the online interview. In this interview, we will talk about your uses of social media and personal experiences of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports. During the interview, I will ask you to go online to your social media accounts and scroll through your accounts and show me and discuss your social media uses and personal experiences related to the topic.

Due to the COVID-19 which requires following certain safety measures, and this including for example remaining physically distanced, it would appear that the scroll back method might not be feasible. As such, this interview will be conducted online. I will ask the participants to choose the best time for them all and also encourage them to decide whatever online platforms they prefer such as Skype and Google Meet etc., for our interviews. Through these platforms, the participants will be encouraged to click the share screen option and share what they see on their social media accounts so that both of us could easily look at their social media activities together. The interview will take between 60 minutes and 120 minutes.

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Taking part in this research project will require you to commit some of your time-to complete interview. However, there are no anticipated disadvantages or any physical or psychological harm for you. In case of potential questions, which make you uncomfortable, I would like to inform you that you can abstain from answering any of them or withdraw from the research without any justification for your decision at any time and if you choose to do this that your data will be destroyed and not be used in the study. The interviews involve you scrolling back through your social media accounts; I would like to inform you that you have the right to show or not to show me whatever content you want in your social media accounts.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Each participant who will agree to participate in the interview stage will receive a 100 SAR (20.00 GBP) Jarrir bookstore voucher as a token of appreciation.

9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications that arise from this project. Any data collected about you will be only accessible to the researcher and her supervisors.

10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

The interview discussion will be conducted in Arabic then transcribed and translated into English. All the recordings during the interview will be stored onto my University of Sheffield Google Drive space or the University Server where they will be kept password protected and they will be accessed only by the researcher. After finishing the use of the transcription, and translation, they will be sorted for 10 years before being destroyed. The findings of the results will be reported in Ms. Nuha Almohammadi's PhD final dissertation. And we also hope to report the findings at conferences and publish the findings in an academic journal. In order to share with you a summary of this research, I will ask you for permission to retain your contact email address. As mentioned above, it is important to note that your individual data will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications that arise from this project. Your data also will be anonymised, and I will use data which is pseudonymised.

11. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

During the interview, you will be recorded by audio only but if you want to take part but not be audio recorded, you have the right to do so. All your interview recordings will be only used for analysis and no other use will be made of them without your written permission. All your individual data will not be made accessible to anyone but to my supervisors and will be stored for 10 years before being destroyed.

12. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being carried out at the University of Sheffield and is funded by the Saudi Arabian Government-King Abdul-Aziz University.

13. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

14. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This research has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the sociological studies department. The University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

15. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

If you have any concerns about this research project during the interview, you can stop whenever you wish. If you want to make a complaint about this research project then you can (Nuha Almohammadi) contact the researcher directly through nalmohammadi1@sheffield.ac.uk or you may contact her supervisors Dr. Stefania Vicari, S.vicari@sheffield.ac.uk or Dr. Kate Weiner, K.weiner@sheffield.ac.uk in the first instance. If your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Head of Department Sociological Studies Professor the of Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk who then will escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

16. Contact for further information

Researcher: Nuha Almohammadi, email: nalmohammadi1@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone UK: 07459873412, international number: +966563636889 and university address: Department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield Building, Northumberland Road, Western Bank, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK, S10 2TU.

In case you have any question, you are kindly invited to contact my supervisors: Name: Dr. Stefania Vicari, email: s.vicari@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone: 01142226452 (external), 26452 (internal) and university address: Elmfield, LG13. Name: Dr. Kate Weiner, email: k.weiner@sheffield.ac.uk, telephone: 01142226491 (external), 26491 (internal) and university address: Elmfield, LG22.

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Thank you for reading this far and considering taking part in this research project. If you would like to participate then please complete and sign the consent form, which is attached.

Appendix IV

Focus Group Questions

During the first stage, the study will conduct 8 focus group discussions with 4 female

university student participants each. The focus group is designed to answer RQ 1: How do

female university students understand physical activity and sports? Do they see any potential

challenges in engaging with them? RQ 2: How do Saudi women understand digital

campaigning targeting women around PA and sports in Saudi Arabia?

Prior to focus group

The participants will be informed on the following prior to each focus group:

> Information about the researcher

➤ The purpose of the study

> The information collected, the procedure of protecting and ensuring confidentiality,

and right to withdraw from the study

The risks, if any, and benefits of the study

The researcher will give all participants sufficient time to read the participant information

sheet and the opportunity to ask questions. If they agree to join the focus group, they will be

asked to sign the consent form.

The time of the focus group

Begin:

Ending Time:

Date:

Place: Interviewer:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Background information:

Tell me about you and your family:

➤ How old are you?

What is your marital status?

> To which school of the university do you belong?

➤ What is your major?

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- ➤ What is your year at the university?
- > Are you a member of a University Sports association? If so, can you name it?

Section 1: Physical activity and challenges

RQ 1: How do female university students understand physical activity and sports? Do they see any potential challenges in engaging with them?

This section particularly aims to find out female university students' definition of physical activity and sports and do they see any potential challenges in engaging with them?

- 1. What do you think is the meaning of physical activity?/What do you think sport means? Can you give me some examples?
- 2. Do you do any physical activity and sports? Tell me about what you do?
- 3. Why do you engage in (basketball, running, walking, tennis etc.,)/physical activity or sports?
- 4. Is there anything that prevents you from engaging in physical activity or sports? If yes, can you tell me the reasons?
- 5. What do you do then? Do you come with any solution to enable you to take up physical activity/sports?
- 6. Do you think family plays a role in supporting/encouraging you with physical activity/sports? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 7. Do you think our customs and traditions in Saudi Arabia encourage us to take up on physical activity?
- 8. Do you think traditional abayas that Saudi women have to wear outside play a role in supporting/encouraging physical activity/sports? If so, how? If not, why not?
- In recent years, there have been developments in Saudi Arabia related to encouraging
 women to engage in physical activities for example, allowing women into sport
 stadiums, sending female athletes to Olympics, and introducing physical education for
 schoolgirls etc.,
- ➤ What do you think about these developments?
- ➤ Have you joined in any of these changes, for example, such as going to the stadium?

> Do you think women should join/undertake sport activities? If yes, why? If not, why not?

Section 2: Understandings of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports

RQ 2: How do Saudi women understand digital campaigning targeting women around physical activity and sports in Saudi Arabia?

This section particularly aims to find out about female university students' understandings of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports on social media.

10. I would like to ask you first: what do you think digital campaigning around physical activity and sports in general means?

Here, in order to provoke further discussions about the topic, the participants will be shown examples of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports on social media. In the first example, the participants will be provided some pictures and videos of social media movements/campaigns that are happening in various social media platforms, for example, in Instagram/Facebook. In the second examples, the participants will be shown some workout videos and fitness posts that have been taken from athletes/influencers/activists' social media accounts. After showing the participants these two examples, questions related to these examples will be asked.

Examples of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports (social media movements/campaigns)¹⁴.

11. Were you aware of these campaigns? Have you ever come across them in your social media views?

¹⁴In Saudi Arabia, in recent years, an increased number of activist groups have turned to social media as a space through which they promote the culture of physical activity and sports at the population level. Among these activist groups, Jeddah Running Collective (JRC) and Running Bliss (RB), a team of runners who have used social media to organise events and continuously encourage particularly women to engage in running by holding regular training sessions for them. The public has been informed of upcoming training schedules and competitions through social media updates. Here, the participants will be shown some videos and pictures of these two runner teams.

- 12. Has anyone participated in these campaigns? If yes (Question No: 13): If not, could you imagine yourself participating in them?
- 13. What is your perspective of these online campaigns/movements?
- 14. Do you think these kinds of campaigns/movements play a role in encouraging people to physical activity and sports? If yes, how and if not why?
- 15. What do you think the impact of these online campaigns/movements on your life or the women that you know?
- 16. How do you see Saudi people interacting with these campaigns/movements online?

 In other words, what do Saudi people say/comment about these online campaigns/movements? What kinds of comments? Can you give me examples of their online comments?
- 17. What do you think about these comments?

Examples of digital campaigning around physical activity and sports (social media athlete/activists/influencers)¹⁵.

- 18. Do you know any physical activity and sport related public figures/athletes/influencers on social media?
- ➤ Who are they?
- > Why do you follow/not follow them?
- What do you think of their social media content?
- ➤ Can you give me examples of the contents that you like/not like?
- 19. How do you see Saudi people interacting with these influencers/athletes online? In other words, what do Saudi people's say/comment about these women online? What kinds of comments?
- 20. What do you think about these comments?

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¹⁵In Saudi Arabia, an increased number of social media athletes/influencers have also used social media to promote the culture of physical activity and sports at the population level. These athletes/influencers/activists use social media to represent, promote and advertise themselves and their sports and physical activity. Among these athletes/influencers, Haya Sawan (a health and fitness activist and TV host), Abrar Bukhari (a Saudi National Champion in Taekwondo), Amel Alshahrani (a Saudi National Champion in CrossFit), Amel Baatia (a CrossFit/Calisthenics Coach), Najia Alfadl (a CrossFit/Calisthenics Coach), and Halah AlHamrani (a Boxing Trainer). Here, the participants will be shown some workout videos and fitness posts that have been taken from these social media athletes and activists' accounts.

- 21. What do you think are the impacts of their contents on your life or the women that you know?
- 22. How important do you think these influencers/athletes are in changing ideas about women's sports in Saudi Arabia?
- 23. What are their chances of making a difference in Saudi society?

Section 3: Digital campaigning and gender norms

This section aims to bring together elements covered in the previous sections (i.e., understandings of 1) physical activity/sports and of challenges for women to practise them and 2) digital campaigning around physical activity and sports). This is meant to contribute to the research's overarching aim to investigate how digital campaigning related to physical activity and sports contributes to female university students' understanding of gender norms in Saudi Arabia.

- 24. What do you think of these social media activist groups who are doing outdoor activities together? Would you like to join them?
- 25. Are there some factors that would possibly prevent you from joining them?
- 26. What do you think of these social media activist groups who are doing outdoor activities in mixed gender events?
- 27. Saudi Arabia has traditionally viewed women performing exercises in public as improper-what do you think about this?
- 28. Do you think walking outside is more socially acceptable than any other forms of exercise, for example, running or cycling? If yes, why and if not why?
- 29. What do you think of the women in the video who are cycling or running outside? Do you think that is appropriate? If yes, why and if not why?
- 30. Do you think these social media activist groups can change your view about women exercising in public? How and why?¹⁶

-

¹⁶Saudi society is divided into the public and private worlds, with men concerned with the outdoor realm and women with what happens indoors. In the public domain, women rely completely on cars for transport and do not walk, even for a short distance that does not require the use of a car. Saudi Arabia has traditionally viewed women exercising in public as improper. As such, I want to see if these forms of digital campaigning have the potential to facilitate a particular change in the participants' views about women performing exercise in public.

- 31. What do you think about the kind of clothing that these social media influencers/athletes/activists wear? Do you like them? Do you have any comments about their appearance?
- 32. Do you like to wear the kind of clothing that these social media influencers/athletes/activists wear on social media? If yes, why and if not why?
- 33. Do you think these social media activist groups/influencers can change your view about Saudi women's traditional dress code? ¹⁷
- 34. Do you think these social media activist groups/influencers who are not conforming to Saudi traditional dress code might be more likely to be the target of criticism on social media, if so why, if not why?

Thank you for taking part in this focus group discussion. Do you have any additional comments you want to make? Do you have particular questions you think that I did not ask you that might be useful to mention the next focus groups?

Interview Questions

This study at its second stage will carry out semi-structured interviews using the method of scroll-back with 11 female university students. The interview is designed mainly to answer RQ 3: How and why Saudi women use social media? How do Saudi women understand the role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and dress codes?

Prior to interview

¹⁷The hijab is a fundamental icon that is associated with the physical appearance of Islamic females. It is a requirement that Muslim females cover their hair and bodies, especially their most attractive features. As such, I want to see if these forms of digital campaigning have the potential to facilitate a particular change in the participants' views about women's clothing.

The participants will be informed on the following prior to each interview:

➤ Information about the researcher

> The purpose of the study

> The information collected, the procedure of protecting and ensuring confidentiality,

and right to withdraw from the study

The risks, if any, and benefits of the study

The researcher will give all participants sufficient time to read the participant information

sheet and will give them the opportunity to ask questions. If they agree to join the interview,

they will be asked to sign the consent form.

The time of the interview:

Begin: Ending time: Date: Place: Interviewer: Pseudonym:

Section 1: Female university students' uses of social media and their understandings of the

role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and

dress codes

RQ 3: How and why Saudi women use social media? How do Saudi women understand the

role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in relation to femininity and

dress codes?

This section particularly aims to learn about female university students' uses of social media,

their understandings of the role of social media influencers, celebrities and sportswomen in

relation to femininity and dress codes and how this in turn contributes to their various

understandings of gender norms in Saudi Arabia.

To provoke further discussions and generate detailed information about the participants'

uses of social media and their personal experiences of social media posts and campaigns

relating to women, physical activity and sports in Saudi Arabia. During the interviews, the

participants will be asked to use whatever devices they have and log onto their social media

accounts and as they scroll through they will answer questions related to their personal

experiences, using specific examples from their social media accounts. Participants will be

informed verbally prior to each interview that they have the right to show or not to show the researcher whatever they want in their social accounts.

1: Social media use and physical activity/sport social media influencers/athletes/activists

- 1. How frequently do you use social media? If daily, how many hours per day would you say that you are on social media?
- 2. What are the social media platforms you often use?
- 3. Can you show me your profile page on these platforms? I can see that you post on this platform (e.g., Instagram) quite often...do you spend a lot of time checking or posting content here?
- 4. What do you usually do on social media? Do you ever check out physical fitness/sport videos/photos/posts? Do you ever post your own physical fitness/sport videos/photos/posts? Can you show me some examples? This looks ..., what were you doing here?
- 5. Do you encounter videos/photos/posts about physical fitness online? How often?
 From whom?
- 6. Can you show me the last one you saw? What do you think about these videos/photos/posts?
- 7. Do you follow any physical activity /sport related public figures/influencers/activists on social media?
- ➤ Who are they? Can you reveal their nationality?
- > Why do you follow them?
- ➤ How long have you been following them?
- 8. Have you ever made comments on their videos/posts? Do you remember what you wrote, can you show me?
- 9. What do you think of their images and content?
- 10. Can you show me a specific post or a video that you did not like? Why did you not like this post/video? What does it mean to you?
- 11. Have you tried to practise any of their workouts or followed any advice that these women post online?

12. What do you think are the impacts of their contents in your life? In other words, have you changed something in your life after you have seen, for example a workout video or fitness post, that these women have posted online? Can you show me the video?

2: Attitudes towards feminine beauty ideals and social media influencers

- 13. Who are the most beautiful actresses, celebrities, and sports influencers you know?

 And why?
- 14. What things do you find attractive? Do you think most people you know would agree? Would any of them not agree and if so, why?
- 15. I see that this social media influencer is exercising (e.g., weightlifting/boxing). What do you think about the kinds of exercising these social media influencers do?
- 16. Do you like to exercise in the same way? Or do you have any reservations about the types of exercises they do?
- 17. Do you think it is appropriate for women to do this kind of sport? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- 18. Do you think this kind of sport should be for men only? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- 19. Do you ever worry about the health effects of these exercises on your health? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- 20. Do you ever wish that your body could be more muscular and stronger?
- 21. Do your parents like this aim?

3: Attitudes towards dress code and social media influencers

- 22. What do you think about the types of clothing that these social media influencers/activists wear? Do you have any comments on their appearance?
- 23. What do you think about that clothing for physical activity and sport that is being worn on social media? I wonder if she is Saudi. Would you know she was not Saudi by looking at her?
- 24. Do you think the types of clothing that these social media influencers wear will be worn by Saudi women? Why?

- 25. Do you think one type of influencer (Saudi influencers, non-Saudi influencers) represents Saudi women? Or do you think all these types of influencers represent Saudi women? Tell me why you think that.
- 26. Have you ever looked at how followers react to social media influencers online? (If yes to Question No: 26) What have you noticed?
- 27. What types of influencers (Saudi influencers, non-Saudi influencers) receive most comments?
- 28. What types of comments do they receive (e.g., supportive, critical, or something else)?
- 29. Why do you think these influencers receive the comments that they do?
- 30. Do you think these social media influencers/activists influence your view about Saudi women's traditional dress code?

4: Attitudes towards physical activity and sports

- 31. Why do you do sports? Does your idea about sports differ from your parents'?
- 32. What are the practical implications of lack of support from your mother or wider family?
- 33. I see these social media influencers playing sport in public. Do you want to join them?
- 34. Do you think it is appropriate for any women, for example, to run or ride a bike in the street? Have you seen a Saudi woman who wishes to do so or who rides a bike in the street?
- 35. Who do you think might not accept non-Saudi influencers, to run or ride a bike in the street more than Saudi influencers (they might say men, religious figures, older people, or the media)? Why?
- 36. Do you think these social media activist groups can change your view of women practising physical activity or sports in public? Can you tell me a little more about your view?

5: Social media influencers' role and the role of social media regarding physical activity and sports

37. Do you think ideas about women's sports in Saudi Arabia need changing and if so, why?

- 38. Do you think that these social media influencers/athletes might be able to change ideas about women's sports in Saudi Arabia?
- 39. Do you think these social media influencers influence/change your understanding about women's sports in Saudi Arabia?
- 40. Who do you think might be influenced by these influencers? Or who do you think might change their understanding about women's sports following these influencers and activist groups?
- 41. Do you think social media use has resulted in any changes in attitude to physical activity and sport for women in Saudi Arabia?
- 42. Can you give me an example?

Thank you for taking part in this interview discussion. Do you have any additional comments you want to make? Do you have particular questions you think that I did not ask you that might be useful to mention the next interviews?