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Environmental Portraits of Saudi Women Entrepreneurs: A Digital Ethnography Study on Instagram

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Abstract

This study investigates Saudi women's experience as social media entrepreneurs within the context of the Saudi national reform plan - Saudi Vision 2030 (SV 2030) - which defines women as labour assets and aims to empower Saudi women in the workforce. This research argues that the SV 2030 creates both structural opportunities and constraints for Saudi women social media entrepreneurs and looks at how they navigate the structural constraints towards empowerment and emancipation. Research about the visual representation of Saudi women at work is very limited mostly due to socio-cultural factors that preclude it. This study seeks to redress this gender gap in the research by documenting Saudi women entrepreneurs' visual representation and determining whether such representation hinders or enhances their entrepreneurial activity and, by extension, their socio-political standing in Saudi society. The research is underpinned by the institutional theory of empowerment and emancipation and Goffman's 1959 approach to self-representation on social media for women entrepreneurs. It is a qualitative study that takes the case study approach using a mix of methods including observation of Saudi women entrepreneurs' online and offline representation, digital ethnographic research techniques, semi-structured interviews with the scroll-back method, visual ethnography, and photo-elicitation with member checking. Research on social media and Saudi women entrepreneurs in the workforce in Saudi Arabia context is a relatively recent phenomenon; as a result, the study is developing a deep understanding of the situation of Saudi women entrepreneurs who use Instagram as a method for improving their positions in the workforce, especially after the new vision of the country 2030 which attempt to empower Saudi women in the workforce. So far, none of the previous studies has conducted visual methods in exploring Saudi women at work; this study produces environmental portraits of Saudi women entrepreneurs in their work environment within the Saudi context through visual representations to fill the gender gap in women representation in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Women work, mixed-gender, social media, entrepreneurship, visual representation