

Citizen Journalism, Public Interest and Social Media in Saudi Arabia

Aljawhara Almutarie

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACCL	Anti-Cyber Crime Law
CJ	Citizen Journalism
EREP	Executive Regulations for Electronic Publishing
ICT	information and communications technology
KSA	The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoCI	Ministry of Culture and Information
PEL	Press Establishment Law
PI	Public interest
PICJ	Public Interest Citizen Journalism
PMPL	Printed Materials and Publication Law
RSS	Rich Site Summary
SM	Social Media

Abstract

This thesis breaks new ground in investigating the nature and practice of public interest citizen journalism (PICJ) in Saudi Arabia (KSA). It offers a deeper understanding of the role and relevance of Citizen Journalism (CJ) in Saudi Arabia by analysing the coverage by Saudi citizen journalists of key economic events as matters of public interest (PI). This thesis defines, and derives a model for the functioning of, the features of PICJ for economic issues. It identifies the stages of development of CJ in Saudi Arabia and investigates the impact of the Internet and social media (in particular, Twitter) on the production and consumption of journalistic content in the KSA.

A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed to achieve the objectives of the research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Saudi citizen journalists (columnists and public figures with Twitter accounts) and licensed professional Saudi journalists, for a total of 30 individuals. In addition, a thematic analysis of Saudi tweets relating to economic affairs that occurred in 2015-2016 (total number of tweets = 10.346, identified from their hashtags) and a quantitative analysis of tweet frequency on the hashtags considered were carried out. This research identifies the specific characteristics and behaviour of Twitter-based online citizen journalists in the KSA to produce a new model of Saudi PICJ for economic issues.

The findings confirm that the traditional Saudi press increasingly depends on CJ on Twitter. Many citizen journalists who are specialists in their field provide high-quality information which is censored from the traditional press. There is also evidence that in certain instances CJ may adopt an agenda-setting function for traditional media by highlighting the concerns, questions, and views of the citizens. The analysis of the hashtags studied (i.e. those relating to Vision 2030, the so-called 'White Lands' tax, and Royal Decrees 2015/16) demonstrated that Saudi citizen journalists are able to make use of social media platforms to address economic issues they feel are in the public interest and contribute to creating a virtual interactive community for debating these issues. Data analysis results reveal that platforms like Twitter give citizen journalists more freedom of expression than traditional Saudi media and allow for an interactivity, both locally and globally, that helps to shape Saudi public interest in relation to economic issues and overcomes, albeit not fully, the limits imposed by state control of traditional media.

Keywords: Saudi citizen journalism, Saudi public interest, social media, Twitter in Saudi Arabia, Saudi economy

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The age of social media (SM) has witnessed a transformation how information is spread across the globe, most notably the use of Twitter¹ to tweet breaking news, especially during crisis events. This phenomenon has led to the emergence of citizen journalism (CJ) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), especially during the economic crisis that has been ongoing there since late 2014. Twitter provides a popular platform for CJ in the KSA where both media professionals and ordinary people post their own version of events on social media, preferring this platform to blogs as it is simpler to use. These accounts often contrast markedly with the official version of events and in some cases, Saudi CJ provides content that is wholly original and has thus radically broken the monopoly over news previously held by state media. This type of Saudi CJ can prompt government responses, with one known case leading to the dismissal of a minister by King Salman after citizens posted videos on Twitter showing poor government service.

This thesis focuses on responses to the financial crisis in the KSA, prompted by the collapse in 2014 of global oil prices, , by two groups of Saudi citizen journalists. Firstly, the columnists (non-professional journalists²) who make a living by writing press articles on economic affairs, while also posting informative content on Twitter for free using their personal accounts. Twitter allows them to air their views without the restrictions they face in the press. Furthermore, it allows them to interact with users, providing much needed

¹ Twitter, a US American online news and social networking (microblogging) service, allows users to post messages (known as "tweets") and interact with these. Originally Tweets were limited to 140 characters but this number was doubled on November 7 2017, for all languages except Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. By adding a hashtag (expressed as #keyword) to any term in their post, users can connect tweets to a general topic or link them into a conversation thread because this acts like a meta tag.

² Professional journalists in the KSA must be members of the Saudi Journalists Association (SJA). Membership is renewed annually and is only available to full-time journalists who must have a degree or media experience. SJA membership serves as a licence to practise journalism in the KSA and has become an essential requirement for journalists in the KSA since 2012.

information about economic issues and answering users' questions. Secondly, the **public figures** who write about economic and other issues they consider important only on social media platforms like Twitter. These two groups can be classified as journalists producing public interest (public interest) CJ in the KSA. They affect news production in the KSA . Thirdly, **professional journalists who** keep up with technology and the development of social media; they post economic content on Twitter, using a professional rather than a personal Twitter account. They post this content on Twitter outside their normal working day to serve the public interest, but they do not interact with followers.

Due to the KSA's relationship with the global oil market, the collapse in oil prices has profoundly impacted on state finances, and the events in this crisis have been unfolded in the sphere of SM, primarily via Twitter, a platform with which Saudis engage heavily (Altuwajiri, 2013). During the 2014 oil crisis, Twitter became the space in which Saudis could voice their concerns and articulate the changes they wished to see. Aware of the economic concerns of Saudi citizens, King Salman showed his interest in discussing solutions to those concerns at an economic summit held in Turkey on November 16 2015, and subsequently, an employment plan intended to develop human resources was launched in the KSA (Tisdall, 2015).

As oil is the main source of income for the Saudi economy, the oil price crisis of 2014 produced significant economic changes in Saudi society and prompted the launch of a new national economic plan, known as *Vision 2030* (for further details on this). This plan has been extensively debated by media outlets, citizen journalists and the general public. SM saw an outpouring of in-depth analysis, explanations, interpretations, judgments and predictions about the nature, dimensions and effects of this new vision for the national economy. This was perhaps only to be expected given that the new economic plan effectively proposed a shift from the KSA being a rentier economy³ to a productive one.

³ A rentier economy relies on revenues from a single raw material. This is the case for all of the Gulf States, which are sometimes also referred to as "patrimonial states". These states are usually thought of as being rentier in their resources and patrimonial in their spending on citizens (Alshaiemi, 2012).

The context was also consistent with the economic changes taking place elsewhere in the world and the trend towards competitiveness, openness and overcoming recession. It has become clear that reaction to *Vision 2030* has helped to create a social movement and an interactive virtual community which engages in dialogue, exchange of ideas, and commentary, using various means of communication. There is some evidence of growing freedom of opinion and expression within Saudi society and enhanced popular participation in this economic reform movement. SM networks have played a key role in this process, with SM accounts belonging to both mainstream media outlets and Saudi citizen journalists having helped facilitate massive public debate in this area.

This discussion has, in turn, been interpreted and evaluated, especially by columnists and public figures who have become opinion leaders thanks to Twitter. Both groups have competed to attract public attention and shape priorities regarding economic issues, as well as promoting interest in these issues (Roubean, 2014).

1.2 Concepts Used in this Study

1.2.1 Citizen Journalism in the KSA

Citizen journalism is a form of media in which individual citizens report events and express concerns regarding poor government services, and post these reports and concerns on social media. The most basic type of CJ refers to ordinary citizens who directly witness events of interest write texts or take photos or videos and post them on social media. In the KSA, the contents of Twitter posts subsequently become part of a hashtag, which frequently becomes trending. When this occurs, the issues are widely discussed and become topical among Saudis. This can result in government action, for example when the King dismissed the ministers of Health and of Utilities (see Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3); government action of this sort is unprecedented in the KSA. The PICJ model 1 (see Figure 7.3 in Chapter 7, Section 7.6) illustrates this form of CJ.

This thesis also considers a second type of CJ, namely the CJ focused on the economic crisis of 2014, when the price of oil collapsed. In this context,

CJ refers to individual citizens covering economic issues using multimedia stories related to the needs and interests of the citizens and reporting events, clarifying information, and answering questions through direct engagement with users to raise awareness regarding economic issues. This type of CJ is performed by two distinct types of citizen: columnists who specialise in economic affairs, who use Twitter in an individual capacity to explain economic issues in layman's terms and to interact with users as participants in public affairs, rather than regarding them as passive receivers; and public figures who only use Twitter to post about economic issues. Both groups are active on Twitter as a result of the Saudi media censorship and regulations limiting coverage of economic issues and banning articles in the traditional press, as one public figure (interviewee PF1) explained: after his first article was banned, he decided "not to write in the traditional press", but instead to publish on Twitter (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.1.1, and Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1). This type of CJ is shown in PICJ model 2 (see Chapter 7, Section 7.6).

1.2.2 Types of CJ in the KSA

- A. A citizen who documents events and expresses concern about poor government services;
- B. A columnist who uses his or her personal account on Twitter to inform users about relevant economic events and to interact with them;
- C. Public Figures with a large number of 'followers', who only post about 'hot issues', such as the economic crisis, that are trending topics in the KSA and affect the lives of Saudi citizens.

1.2.3 Public Interest in the KSA

Issues related to media regulation, which range from media intrusion and personal privacy to matters which concern the relationship between the media and the State, can be classified as matters of public interest. The Saudi Basic Law of Media stipulates that in relation to public interest, the role of the media is to strengthen national unity. Saudi media regulation puts the State and the editors-in-chief in charge of limiting content for matters related to censorship or prohibited items, as explained in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.2). This means that

the only voice that is heard in traditional press is that of the State; the voices of the Saudi citizens are absent.

In this thesis, economic issues are seen as matters of Saudi public interest. This will be argued through the following points:

- Royal Decrees, 2015: when Salman bin Abdel Aziz became King in January 2015, there were five economic decisions made in his Royal Decrees. After a period of only one year, these decrees had started to resolve some of the most important problems faced by Saudi citizens, as well as provide support for state institutions. The Economics department of Al Eqtisadiyah, a Saudi newspaper specialising in economic affairs, undertook an analysis of King Salman's Royal Decrees, which stated that the 'white lands' tax, which levied an annual tax of 2.5% on the market value of unused land located within urban areas, was among the most significant economic decisions made by King Salman. There had been a serious housing crisis in the KSA for years, and this tax was intended to solve it (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1).
- Royal Decrees, 2016: These Royal Decrees cut the salaries, benefits, and allowances paid to state employees, with the intent to deal with the economic crisis by restructuring the financial support provided by the government to citizens. According to economic analysts, the salaries of government employees account for an estimated 50% of the Saudi budget, and 30% of the salary is comprised of allowances. Since 2014, when there was a budget deficit of \$98 billion, Saudi revenue has decreased by 50%, owing to the drop of the price of oil, of which the KSA is the world's largest exporter (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2).
- White Lands Tax, 2015: as of 2015, 'white lands' occupied around 50% of the area of big cities of the KSA, such as Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam. When this tax was passed it was the first time that Saudi citizens had heard the term 'tax'. Moreover, 80% of Saudis did not own a house. By passing this tax as a solution to the long-standing Saudi housing crisis (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.1), King Salman performed a radical policy change which most certainly was of public interest.

- Saudi Vision 2030: In order to address the economic crisis, there were many economic changes that the government initiated. These changes were, arguably, the most pressing concern for Saudi citizens in 2015-2016. The Saudi Vision 2030 economic plan showed that economic issues are important to Saudi citizens. It focused on, and tried to address, key economic issues such as unemployment, the white lands tax, the employability of women, and housing shortages, all of which are of interest to ordinary citizens and are capable of making them pay more attention to relevant economic events (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.3.2).

1.2.4 Public Interest Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalists, especially those writing about economic issues in the KSA, serve public interest by calling for Saudis to actively participate in community life and by equipping people with the information they require to do this. It can be said, then, that citizen journalists assume responsibility for their communities. In the KSA, CJ has three central features: Firstly, the readers are not simply addressed as a passive audience, but as people who will potentially take part in public affairs; secondly, the readers are shown how to act on the issues that the CJ is providing information about; and thirdly, the readers are invited to openly discuss these matters among themselves.

Citizen journalists consider matters of public interest to be related to the right that ordinary citizens have to be informed about what is happening in the world and in their communities. To define what constitutes public interest, they typically poll the public on economic issues related to certain hashtags (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4.1.). They also find information on concepts that Saudis may not know about but could potentially be interested in: things like 'budget', 'balance', and 'inflation' (see Section 5.4.2). In this context, citizen journalists go beyond the definition of public interest given by the State, and post, typically on Twitter, about socio-economic issues that profoundly affect the lives of the population, and about which the population either cares deeply about or is misinformed.

1.3 The Significance of this Study

Most research conducted on CJ does not focus non-western social and political settings; which can lead to a distorted perception of what CJ entails in different parts of the world. Currently, European and American experiences of CJ heavily influence global perceptions of this phenomenon. However, there are distinct differences between CJ in the developed and the developing world, where the latter is characterized by formidable political and legal challenges. Moyo (2014) notes that citizen journalists in repressive countries help to create new forms of citizenship through their work. In some cases, this is viewed as a radical threat to the status quo, and attracts strong reactions from the authorities including imprisonment, physical harm, and even death. These measures may also include censorship and internet blockage. This research addresses the impact of CJ in non-democratic countries, specifically the KSA. It aims to produce a model that provides a better understanding of the manifestations of - and relationships between - the PI and CJ in the KSA.

In order to achieve this, the research focuses on identifying the role and activity of citizen journalists possessing a special interest in issues of economic reform in Saudi society who operate within the new interactive online media environment, using Twitter. It evaluates the importance of this phenomenon and the reasons for its emergence and current popularity.

This research makes several key contributions. Firstly, it documents the dimensions and significance of the phenomenon of PICJ in Saudi society and discusses the differing interpretations it has received. Using an analysis of Twitter data and interviews with key participants a model is created which provides a comprehensive view of PICJ in the KSA previously absent from the literature. This study also evaluates the positive and negative aspects of CJ and proposes a series of recommendations for further development of PICJ. A key element of this research is analysis of Twitter as a means of interaction between citizen journalists and Saudi citizens for discussion of economic issues using this new media platform. The research provides new evidence of the extent to which citizen journalists using Twitter shape Saudi PI with regard to economic affairs and how they achieve this.

1.4 Research Questions

Since to date there have been relatively few studies discussing the relationships between the Saudi public interest and citizen journalism, this research will address the following questions:

1. What are the factors that have led to the rise of CJ in the KSA?
2. In which ways does the public interest manifest itself in citizen journalism in the KSA?
3. What are the attitudes of Saudi citizens and professional journalists towards citizen journalism?
4. In which ways and to what extent does Twitter link the public interest and citizen journalism in the KSA?

1.5 Aim and Objectives

1.5.1 Aim

- To provide a better understanding of the manifestations of — and relationships between — the public interest and citizen journalism in the KSA.

1.5.2 Objectives

- To chart and explain the emergence and features of citizen journalism in the KSA.
- To establish the nature and function of public interest in relation to Saudi journalism.
- To determine the role played by Twitter in articulating and developing citizen journalism in the KSA.
- To provide an explanatory model of public interest citizen journalism for economic issues in the KSA.

1.6 Knowledge Gap

There is a limited understanding of what constitutes the public interest in Saudi CJ and the contribution of this thesis is to close this gap. The research focuses on public interest related to economic matters only, specifically in the context of CJ on social media (SM) (specifically Twitter). Evidence of this in the KSA with

respect to economic matters is provided and the aim and objectives of this research were designed to address the knowledge gap by creating a model of PICJ for economic issues in the KSA.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One The introductory chapter identifies the significance of the study and its aim and objectives. It also highlights the knowledge gap it addresses and the research contribution it makes. In addition, it describes the nature of CJ in the KSA, identifying the groups involved in this. It concludes by providing an overview of the structure of this thesis.

Chapter Two This chapter provides a brief contextual overview of the KSA. It describes the social, political and legal context of this Gulf State, and information and communications technology (ICT) in the KSA. It also considers the ongoing financial crisis there and key economic issues, explaining how Royal Decrees and Twitter work in the Saudi context. It also highlights how online interactions on this platform provide a line of communication between Saudi citizens and the state, and comments on the power of religious leaders and their role in media regulation. Finally, it examines how socio-economic and cultural elements shape the content of Saudi journalism, providing insights into the extent to which Saudi media policy and regulation impact on news and journalistic practices.

Chapter Three This chapter begins by presenting the emergence and development of CJ, with a specific focus on CJ in the Arab world, highlighting the role of SM, especially Twitter, in the formation of CJ in the KSA. It also reviews existing literature on PI in media, focusing on a range of themes and issues of particular relevance to the current study, namely: PI in journalism; the convergence between journalistic practices and PI; control of the media in the KSA and PI; links between PI, economic issues and SM in

the KSA, with specific emphasis on Twitter. Finally, this chapter traces the development of Saudi journalism and media regulation in the KSA, showing how socio-economic and cultural elements shape the content of Saudi news, providing insights into why and how Saudi media policy and regulation impact on news and journalistic practices. It also considers the extent to which this has led Saudi audiences to view CJ as representing the PI rather than the traditional Saudi media.

Chapter Four This chapter describes the methodology employed in this research. It details the mixed method approach taken, explaining the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods used. Semi-structured interviews were used with Saudi professional journalists, citizen journalists who are columnists and public figures, all of whom communicate on Twitter. Twitter data were analysed using a thematic analysis of Saudi tweets and tweet frequency to produce numerical data. The chapter also considers issues relating to research quality (validity and reliability) and compliance with ethical guidelines.

Chapter Five This chapter presents the analysis of the interview data, identifying key issues linked to the emergence of CJ in the KSA. Interviewees were questioned about the role of CJ and how it shapes PI in the KSA. They asserted that using Twitter as a CJ platform allows them express their opinions freely and provide regularly updated informative content about economic issues. Royal Decrees and economic issues were highlighted as a matter of core PI as they affect Saudi citizens' social and political lives on a daily basis and their future prospects.

Chapter Six This chapter presents the analysis of the Twitter data from four hashtags trending in 2015/2016. Themes that were identified highlighted the role of Twitter in linking CJ to shaping PI, the freedom of expression this platform provides for addressing issues considered taboo in the

traditional press and the role of citizen journalists in raising awareness about the Saudi economic crisis. Twitter findings were intended to address the knowledge gap identified earlier in this thesis and identify those elements that can contribute to creating a model of PICJ in the KSA.

Chapter Seven Here the results of the Saudi case studies are presented and findings are compared and contrasted with existing literature and studies. This chapter fills the gap in knowledge by creating a model of PICJ in the KSA, explaining the constituents of the model and their inter-relationships.

Chapter Eight The concluding chapter summarises the main findings, outlines the limitations of the study and presents suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two: The Saudi Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the Saudi context of this research. It begins by giving a general description of the KSA, its location, population, history and culture before focusing more specifically on features directly connected with the topic under study. Media regulation in the KSA is also outlined and the Printed Materials and Publication Law (PMPL) is described in detail. Examples are given of how this law is used to control the media and important amendments to the PMPL are considered. The control of electronic media by the Executive Regulations for Electronic Publishing (EREP) and the control of journalism by the Press Establishment Law (PEL) are briefly outlined before moving onto the Anti-Cyber Crime Law (ACCL). The section on ICT in the KSA, the focus is on social media platforms (Twitter in particular) and how these have radically affected how ordinary Saudis discuss social and economic issues and how religious leaders are viewed. The impact of Twitter in the KSA is explored, before shifting the focus onto the Saudi economic crisis, which were directly responsible for the emergence of the specific hashtags explored in this study. Important details are also given about Royal Decrees, the White Lands Tax and *Vision 2030*.

2.2 Location and Population

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located in the Arabian Peninsula and occupies over 2,000,000 km², approximately 80% of the Peninsula, acting as a bridge between Africa and Asia. Yemen, Oman and the Red Sea lie to the west of the KSA; to the north, it is bordered by Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait. Its eastern neighbour is Qatar and with the United Arab Emirates and the Arabian Gulf to the south (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). The KSA has a population in excess of 33.4 million, of which 64% (20.7 million) are Saudi nationals (GaStat, 2018), meaning that almost a third of the population of the KSA is made up of foreign workers (CIA, 2019). About 22% of total global oil reserves can be found

in Saudi territory and the KSA is the largest exporter of petroleum with almost half of the KSA's GDP coming from its oil industry at present (*ibid*).

2.3 Social and Political Context

King Abdelaziz Al Saud founded the KSA in 1932, a state in which the monarch was both head of state and of the Council of Ministers. This system persists to this day. The king also plays a role in religious leadership as King Abdelaziz originally sought the support of Saudi tribal leaders in this way. According to Wilson and Graham (1994, p. 36), "Arab traditionalism is one of the two roots of the Al Saud's legitimacy; the other is Islam, specifically the Al Saud's vow to protect it and the two holy cities of Makkah and Medina." This unifying strategy ensured that Islam prevailed and the Saudi dynasty has continued since King Abdelaziz's death in 1953 as he has been succeeded by six of his sons, namely: Saud Ibn Abdelaziz, Faisal Ibn Abdelaziz, Khalid Ibn Abdelaziz, Fahd Ibn Abdelaziz, Abdullah Ibn Abdelaziz and most recently Salman Ibn Abdelaziz who became monarch in 2015 (Najai, 1982, p.29). This king's reign has already seen more openness and a number of social reforms, with youth having a voice in the figure of Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, considered to be "a young man in a big hurry" and sometimes seen as the power behind the throne.⁴

2.3.1 The Monarch's View on Media

In May 2015, King Salman dismissed a senior aide for allegedly slapping a journalist during a photo-op as he welcomed Morocco's King Mohammed at Riyadh airport (Withnall, 2015). A video of the King's aide committing this act upon the journalist surfaced on YouTube and attracted immense attention on a variety of social media sites, especially within the KSA, after which it was announced that the aide had been replaced. For many Saudis, this was perceived as a success for journalism as a whole and commentators observed that this demonstrated the King's support for the fourth estate, while also establishing that no individual was above the rule of law (Withnall, 2015).

⁴ Saudi Arabia's Deputy Crown Prince and the youngest Minister of Defense in the world (at age 32). He is also a chief of the Royal Court, and chairman of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs.

Whether the King's actions were an act of goodwill or were intended to calm the furore on SM has never been clearly determined; nevertheless, it demonstrated that the media in the KSA was gaining more respect from the monarchy as a sector, as well as increased freedom and tolerance. Furthermore, it highlighted the active nature of SM in the KSA and its influence over public opinion and events. *The Gulf News* even went as far as to note that King Salman's move was "a clear consolidation of the status" of the fourth estate and a legitimate victory for journalism (Toumi, 2015).

Three months earlier, the Saudi King had delivered his "state of the kingdom" address, which noted, among other things, the role of the KSA's media "in accordance with the teachings of Islam" in providing access to information and expressing opinions, whilst simultaneously promoting harmony and construction (Alzahrani, 2016). He spoke positively about the contribution of journalism in Saudi society, especially in strengthening bonds of unity among citizens. While these comments highlight the monarch's support for media initiatives, they also mandate what journalism in the KSA should achieve and how its agenda is determined: in accordance with the teachings of Islam.

2.3.2 Saudi Society and Culture

The KSA is a conservative Arab Islamic society, where religion plays a fundamental part in regulating customs, norms and values. The nation has nevertheless been characterized by enormous socio-economic changes in the last eight decades (Al Munajjed, 1997). In general, the Saudi people share a language and culture. They also place great importance on the family, which defines the individual's social status, and social obligations and loyalties are centred on this, and on Islam (Shaikh, 1989). Indeed, "Islam plays a central role in defining the culture, and acts as a major force in determining the social norms, patterns, traditions, obligations, privileges and practices of society" (Al-Saggaf, 2004, p.1).

Traditionally, the KSA was a tribal society, with each tribe being led by a sheikh who, together with other male elders, made decisions. There were some tribal differences between people in the Najd, Hijaz, Ahsa and Asir regions of the KSA but family and religion were of paramount importance. There were also three main social divisions: the Bedouins who were nomads living in desert

tents, villagers who worked largely on farms, and townspeople (Wilson and Graham, 1994).

Another central feature of Saudi society is its patriarchy, which stems from the domination of males over females in the family but extends to almost every aspect of social life. This means that women cannot be autonomous, in that they need male permission to carry out activities like travelling and that in most Saudi families the older males have most power and females the least (Shaikh, 1989, Doumato, 2000). However, in May 2017, the King decreed that women did not have to obtain consent from a male guardian in order to access government services. This decree was part of a strategy to diversify from the current reliance on the oil industry, meaning that there was a need to include more women in the workforce (*Mail online*, 2017).

2.4 Legal Context

2.4.1 Media Regulation in the KSA

In order to gain a better understanding of the Saudi press, it is important to consider the regulatory context in the KSA. The challenges which the press faces and the transformations it has gone through are discussed elsewhere in this thesis (see 0). Examining the regulations that cover the Saudi media in general, the press, printed material and online publishing in the KSA will help to explain why the PI function in the KSA is problematic, thus creating an opportunity for it to be addressed through CJ.

The 30 Articles of Saudi Media Policy are built on four sets of principles, namely: Islamic values and precepts, Arab socio-cultural values, the political system of the KSA, and Saudi nationalism. Social Media Policy is ratified by two ministers (Media and Military) and the monarch in the KSA and has thus legal status. Its core elements are referred to as 'Articles'. Articles 1-4 and 22-23 require the media to adhere to Islamic values and promote national interests while Articles 5-7 and 24 specify that the media must promote the KSA's image both nationally and internationally and create social cohesion by increasing awareness of Saudi nationalism. Family values, age and gender roles are dealt with in Articles 8-11 which are concerned with creating a healthy society. The policy views family as the foundation of Saudi society and therefore requires the

media to promote 'family values', and give special attention to media provision for children and young people, and also produce specialized content that is deemed to be of interest to women and their specific roles within the KSA's Islamic society. In Article 17 the importance of the correct use of Modern Standard Arabic⁵ and respect for the rights of the individual are covered by other articles as is the freedom of the press within the restrictions imposed by Islamic and nationalistic principles (Alzahrani, 2016).

2.4.2 Printed Materials and Publication Law (PMPL)

After its first enactment in 1928, the PMPL was updated by Royal Decree in 1939, 1958, 1982 (Alshamik, 1982), 2000 and most recently on 29 April 2011 in relation to digital newspapers when the PMPL was re-formulated as 49 articles (*Al-Watan*, 2011). The updated articles in the 2011 version of the PMPL were intended to encompass recent developments in digital communications, especially the Internet (Alzahrani, 2016).

Saudi censorship regulations have changed significantly over time, reflected in changes in the content of the PMPL. The first version of this law contained 36 Articles, but this increased to 62 after its second amendment (Awad, 2010). This second amendment notably split responsibility for any articles printed equally between the owner of a publication and its editor-in-chief; however, in the following amendments, this responsibility fell entirely on the shoulders of a newspaper's editor-in-chief (Alshamik, 1982). As Alzahrani (2016) observed, other notable changes were the establishment of a new Saudi Council of Ministers)⁶ and an Appeal Committee to settle disputes and take on the responsibilities for censorship previously carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Information (MoCI).

The third amendment to the PMPL in 1958 did not entail any significant changes to its 57 articles, apart from clarifying and enhancing the role of the General Directorate for Broadcasting, Press and Publication (GDBPP) as sole body with responsibility for oversight of press and other media activities

⁵ A standardized and formal variety of Arabic recognized throughout the Arab world to facilitate communication.

⁶ This Primary Committee, headed by the King, and made up of the Council of Ministers is the direct executive authority in KSA. The Council of Ministers has the power to establish the nation's internal, external, financial, economic, educational, and defence policies.

(Alshebaili, 2000). This version of the PMPL was still in force when the 1964 Institutional Press Directive was promulgated. As this Directive was concerned with ownership of the press, transfer of licenses from individuals to press organisations, and gave the Ministry of Information the responsibility for this licensing, it did not concern matters relating to publication and editing, meaning there was no need to amend the PMPL (Awad, 2010).

The PMPL can be used to target articles that express opinions that are unwelcome to the authorities such as criticism of government ministries, services, or religious leaders and to impose censorship on these, affecting topics that are related to Saudi PI. The changes in these articles of law have effectively served to shape citizens' points of view in terms of the relationship between the Saudi press and the PI.

This was shown when the newspaper *Al Adwaa*⁷ confronted the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) during the reign of King Saud. It was a free and independent publication which used modern language and a subtle approach. It praised the achievements of King Saud, but also strongly criticised the Ministry of Health, the Saudi municipalities and other government departments. It focused on the need for developing the national economy, labour and labour regulations and was supportive of initiatives concerned with the education of girls, then a highly contentious issue.⁸ It also focused on the positive and negative aspects of the business community in Jeddah, as well as the arts and social issues.

When *Al Adwaa* challenged ARAMCO's discriminatory policies this eventually led to the closure of the newspaper. This confrontation began with a front-page report (published on 12 August, 1958) in which it mentioned that the Jeddah Fundraising Committee for the victims of the Mecca fire, headed by Sheikh Mohammed Al Tawil, had criticised ARAMCO's "very small" donation, claiming it was an affront to national dignity. *Al Adwaa* agreed that "a company

⁷ This weekly newspaper was launched in Jeddah in 1957 by a group of Saudi youth. It ran for 18 months then stopped.

⁸ Initiatives and projects for girls' education took place during that period preceding King Saud's royal decree ordering the establishment of girls' schools in the Kingdom in 1959.

that is draining our resources” should have contributed more generously (see Figure 0.1).

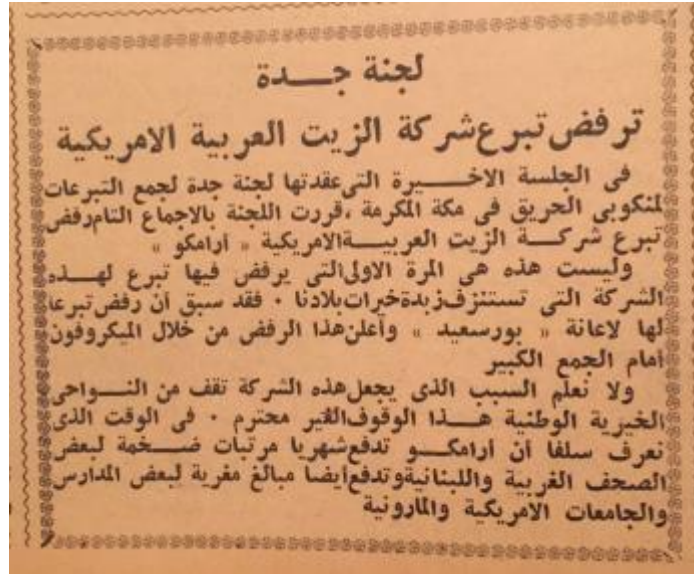


Figure 0.1: Al Adwaa’s article about ARAMCO’s donation (12 August, 1958)

The content of *Al Adwaa* during the late fifties provides a good insight into its policy at the time. Issue 63 (19 August 1958) carried Mahmoud Aref’s⁹ column highlighting the lack of equality in ARAMCO’s terms of employment for Saudi and foreign workers. *Al Adwaa* also compared ARAMCO’s scholarship scheme to that of the Baghdad Oil Company and revealed the poor living conditions for Saudi workers based at ARAMCO’s headquarters in Dhahran. Interestingly, *Al Adwaa* continued to publish ARAMCO’s advertising throughout this period, showing the level of freedom of expression at the time.

It continued its anti-ARAMCO campaign in issue No. 70 (23 September, 1958) with an article comparing ARAMCO’s donation to the Dar Al Hanan Orphanage (\$133) with the sum it donated to the Kennedy Memorial Hospital (\$15,000). *Al Adwaa* launched a series entitled: “Everything about ARAMCO” focusing on anti-ARAMCO sentiments and the discriminatory policies operated by the company. Newspaper publication was suspended for three weeks after Mohammed Amin Yehya’s article entitled ‘The Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad’ was deemed to have caused religious offence and the author was required to issue an apology but no direct mention was made of the criticisms directed at ARAMCO.

⁹A Saudi poet and intellectual

Al Adwaa resumed its anti-ARAMCO campaign with issue 75/76 (4 November, 1958) focusing on the failure of its public relations director to understand local concerns and issue 83/84 (16 September, 1958) carrying an investigative report on ARAMCO's budget. The newspaper also showed evidence of popular support for its campaign, carrying a piece by Ali Esseiri, of the Passports and Nationality Department in Jeddah, criticising ARAMCO's discrimination against Saudi workers and one by Abdul Wahhab Ashi, a leading Saudi journalism at the time, berating American officials at ARAMCO (see Figure 0.2).



Figure 0.2: An anti-ARAMCO piece by a top Saudi intellectual

Ordinary citizens from different areas of the Kingdom (Dhahran, Riyadh, Baqi and Arar) also wrote to express their views, showing the influence of *Al Adwa* (see Figure 0.3).



Figure 0.3: An article showing the public interest of Saudis from different cities in the KSA

After 90 issues and 20 months of publishing, the newspaper's license was confiscated, leading to its closure, following its publication of a story by the then famous journalist, Mohammed Said Ba'shen, about a slave named Salem who had been granted his freedom. *Al Adwa's* owners voiced their opinion on more than one occasion that this was a mere pretext and that the real reason for this decision was its campaign against ARAMCO. *Al Adwa* is still considered to be one of the boldest journalistic ventures in the history of the press in the KSA (Sabagh, 2015).

١٢ - الأضواء ١٣٧٨/٧/٣ هـ

سالم شارى نفسه

جلالة الملك المعظم يساعد «سالم» على أن يكون حراً

سالم يقول : الفضل لله ثم لسعود

يقدمه جازراً لسيفه لما لاعت
 .. وأخيراً ثلاثة آلاف ريال
 في ثلاث سنوات كان خلائه
 يعمل ليل نهار .. وعلم أن
 قد عرف بمكانه .. فارتد
 مرارته لأنه لم يكسب في
 التسن الذي يجب أن يقدمه
 .. كان عليه أن يتخسر
 ريال آخرى يصعب معه حبه
 آلاف ريال .. لأن سلفه
 من العصابة به ٢٥٠٠ روي
 واستفاد بالرجل الرج
 البر الوفي . استغاث بـ
 الملك سعود .. وكان جلالت
 وليا للعهد .. وحده است
 بطلب الفين من الريالات .
 وساعده جلالت كما فعله في
 على الناس في القافة ..
 بسنحه الألفين ريال .. و
 أخرجه وأسرع إلى التاجر
 .. وعرض عليه مبلغاً كمالاً

**إذا زرت « حائل » البلد الطيب الوادع ذا
 المناخ الطبيعي الجميل ستسمع أغرب اسم
 يمكن أن يتبادى به أنسان « سالم شارى
 نفسه » .. من هو سالم ؟ وكيف استطاع
 أن يشتري نفسه .**

**الأضواء تكشف لك الحقيقة .. أحد
 أبناء حائل يروي لك القصة
 ومحمد سعيد باعشن رئيس تحرير هذه
 الصحيفة يكتب لك هذه الإحاسيس والصور
 الفنية بأسلوبه .. والكاميرا .. والصور
 توضح لك هذه المأساة .. التي عاشها ..
 رجل استطاع أن يصبح حراً طليفاً ..**

قال لي أحد أبناء حائل
 سأسمعك أقرب قصة .. قصة
 رجل استطاع أن يصبح حراً
 طليفاً بعد أن كان عبداً ..
 يروي لي ما شاهدت ..
 وما رأي .. وزودني بالصور
 اللازمة .. وحينئذ من نهاية
 الحديث صورة .. صورة لسند
 برقية أرسلها سالم إلى جلالت
 المعظم سعود لكي يساعده في
 التسن من شراء نفسه ..
 وكان الملك سعود كما فعله دائماً
 لإنسان الأمل والقلب الكبير ..
 لساعد سالم : دفع له مبلغ ألفان
 من الريالات وساعده في التحرر
 من الحرب ..
 وبعد أن فرغ الأخ من أهله
 مدينة ودعي .. وشك على بني
 وأختت القلم .. ويدات في
 كتابة هذه المحاولة الإنسانية ..
 .. وأتمت

وأخبره كمالك لإنسانته إن



خطف من (حرض) وبيع في البحرين) وتحرر في (السعودية)

سالم بن محمد بن يحيى

إدارة بركات السلطنة العربية السعودية

	إباضات البرقية	إبارة قروض
١٤٠٠	القرية	١٠٠
١٤٠١	السكيات	١٠٠
١٤٠٢	للسد	١٠٠
١٤٠٣	الورد	١٠٠
١٤٠٤	إشارة	١٠٠
١٤٠٥	الطريق	١٠٠
١٤٠٦	التاريخ	١٠٠
١٤٠٧	الرويات	١٠٠
١٤٠٨	إبارة قروض	١٠٠
١٤٠٩	إبارة قروض	١٠٠
١٤١٠	إبارة قروض	١٠٠

صورة سند البرقية التي دفعها سالم إلى جلالة الملك سعود عندما
 أن كان وليا للعهد فامتدت له بسعود العناية لتقلده وتعيد إليه
 الثقة بالحياة والناس

Figure 0.4: An article showing the story of poor people's struggle



Figure 0.5: An anti-ARAMCO article



Figure 0.6: An ARAMCO advertisement in the same issue as the anti-ARAMCO article

The 46 articles of the fourth PMPL (1982) contained some important amendments: Firstly, it confirmed freedom of expression within the boundaries of Islamic law and the State constitution. Secondly, newspapers were no longer required to send drafts to the GDBPP for approval prior to publication. Thirdly, all responsibility for published material belonged to the editor-in-chief of a publication. According to Awad (2010), some seven topics were specifically prohibited in this version of PMPL, namely:

1. Anything which contradicted Islamic rules and general norms.
2. All matters not conforming to State security and its general fundamentals.
3. All confidential information, unless prior consent had been obtained from the relevant authority.
4. Reports on, and information connected with, the Saudi armed forces.
5. Laws, regulations, treaties, agreements or other official statements prior to their announcement by the government.
6. Anything deemed detrimental to Heads of States or diplomatic missions in the KSA or that may otherwise harm the relations of the KSA with friendly countries.
7. Any defamation or calumny against individuals. (Awad, 2010).

This media policy has served to promote the interests of the *Wahhabiyya* (ultraconservative Sunni Muslims). These religious leaders continue to hold sway over the cultural content of media with sanctions against journalists and newspapers having resulted largely from pressure by religious leaders. Thus, in 1957, Abdul Karim AlGhuhiman, editor of *Al-Dhahran News*, was arrested for expressing views that were judged too liberal and his outlet shut down. Religious leaders also took exception to liberal views expressed in the radio programme *Discussion of the Week* which led to participating journalists being sacked and the programme being suspended (Alotaibi, 2017).

Saudi citizen journalists use media to focus on issues that concern their immediate communities. However, this is not a question of promoting a regional identity; rather, journalists are concerned about reporting Saudi news that does not get covered elsewhere. Saudis are increasingly voicing their true perception

of state-controlled national media, as the incident of the King's aide, as well as the public reaction to Badawi's incarceration¹⁰demonstrates (Wood, 2015). This has impacted on what is perceived to be popular news within the KSA.

In addition to this shift to Saudi stories, Wood's (2015) survey reveals that language has changed overall accessibility. Nine out of ten respondents reported receiving their news in Arabic (Wood, 2015) since SM platforms now offer Saudi channels of communication, offering news in the local variant of Arabic that is accessible to the majority of the population. The shift to delivering news in colloquial Arabic instead of English, as was once the case, has led to a growing sense of pride in national culture and identity that has a unifying effect (Wood, 2015).

As noted previously, prior to 1964, newspapers and publications were privately owned and so individuals had a mandate to set their own personal agenda for media coverage (Al-Harithi, 1983) until the Saudi government outlawed privately owned publications, forcing them to become public companies. They were then able to impose regulations on these publications, maintaining control over the information which went into the public sphere. However, developments such as CJ represent a means of getting around this government mandate. This trend also raises the issue of credibility within the media in the KSA and how it determines the role of citizens and mainstream journalists.

Some 11 of the articles in the latest version of the PMPL apply directly to the national press but only nine are of direct relevance to this study. Article 3 requires all printed material to be in accordance with the principles of Islam and of a "good moral standard". Article 8 allows for freedom of expression "within the provisions of *Shari'ah* and the law". Article 9 stipulates eight criteria that printed material must adhere to in order to be considered fit for publication. Article 24 makes provisions for censorship of Saudi papers or banning of a

¹⁰ Badawi, a Saudi dissident and writer who created the *Free Saudi Liberals* website was arrested for "insulting Islam through electronic channels" in 2012. Convicted in 2013 on several charges, including apostasy, he was sentenced to seven years in prison and 600 lashes, increased in 2014 to 10 years imprisonment, 1000 lashes, and a fine. Fifty lashes were administered in January 2015 but at the time of writing (2018), the second flogging has been postponed over a dozen times, following criticism from the European Union, US, Sweden, Canada, the UN and others. Badawi's wife and children have been granted asylum in Canada.

newspaper only “under extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the President of the Council of Ministers”. Article 33 gives responsibility for published matter to the editor-in-chief or his proxy while responsibility for content remains with the writer. Article 35 orders publication of a correction to any incorrect statement “upon the request of the party concerned” for free in the first issue after the request for correction and in the same place as the original error or in a prominent position in the publication. Anyone who has been slandered, defamed or damaged in any way has the right to claim compensation. Article 36 empowers the MoCI to withdraw “any issue of a newspaper without compensation” if it contravenes *Shari’ah* “pursuant to a decision by the committee from the Ministry of Information provided for in Article 37”. Finally, Article 38 stipulates:

Without prejudice to any other harsher punishment provided for by another law, anyone who violates any of the provisions of this Law shall be punished by a fine not exceeding fifty thousand riyals, the closure of his place of business or establishment for a period not exceeding two months, or by permanent closure of his place of business or establishment. A decision as to the punishment shall be issued by the Minister pursuant to a proposal by the committee provided for in Article 37 of this law (PMPL, 2011).

The current version of the PMPL contains a number of ambiguities and lack of clarity. No precise details are given about what may or may not be published. For example, although Article 8 guarantees “freedom of expression” within constitutional rules and *Shari’ah*, there is no clear definition of what might constitute freedom of expression. Given that there are several possible interpretations of the Qur’an and of Islamic precepts found in *Shari’ah* and the *Sunnah*,¹¹ it is no easy feat for editors or journalists to know exactly what this Article prohibits or allows to be published.

Each newspaper has its own set of red lines related to its ideology, which explains why the freedom of expression differs from one publication to another. For example in *Al-Watan*, journalists are allowed to express their opinions on the activities and pronouncements of religious leaders while this kind of criticism

¹¹ Along with the *Qu’ran* the *Sunnah* is a primary source of Islamic law. It specifically deals with the traditional, social, and legal practices of the Islamic community and is based on the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

would not appear in *Al-Jazirah*. For this reason, conservative Saudi Muslims often sarcastically refer to *Al-Watan* as *Al-Wathen* instead, playing on the similarities between these two Arabic words, the latter meaning 'heathenism'.

Articles 24 to 34 are completely focused on giving the regional press freedom from censorship, although the national press is still subject to post-publication censorship by the MoCI as before and there is no definition or even indication of what the "extraordinary circumstances" mentioned in the legislation might be. There is a similar problem with Article 9 since none of the crucial terms such as "public interest" or "constructive criticism" is defined. Moreover, Article 36 explains that violating the provisions of *Shari'ah* may lead to an issue of the publication being withdrawn without compensation, but it fails to detail what issues might be regarded as doing this. This Article also appears to contradict Article 31 whereby newspaper issues can only be banned with the consent of the Council of Ministers. Article 38 is contradicted by Article 31; the same is true for Articles 33 and 8. Article 33 holds both the editor-in-chief and the writer/journalist responsible for materials published; Article 8 appears to promote freedom of expression, but this is difficult if editors-in-chief are held responsible for all the views expressed by authors. In effect, Article 33 allocates the job of censor to the editor-in-chief who has to represent the MoCI at his publication.

These ambiguities and lack of clarity allow the MoCI to simply interpret the PMPL articles however it wishes and suppress any item it wants by deeming it to be against Islam, the constitution or PI without any specific legal directive. Arguably, the PMPL simply serves the interests of the Ministry in controlling the national press. Given this situation, the Saudi press is obliged to follow any guidelines issued by the MoCI. Although newspapers are required to provide "objective criticism" that "serves the public interest" no definitions are provided for these terms, leaving them open to interpretation. Furthermore, no person or organisation is given the responsibility for deciding what the PI actually is. Guidelines are issued on a regular basis to give publications more precise guidance on what they cannot publish. The fact that the MoCI has to do this demonstrates the inadequacy of the PMPL (Freedom House, 2016).

The fifth version of the PMPL does not differ radically from the previous version and fails to take account of global developments in information and

communication technology such as satellite channels. Saudis have been able to access satellite channels since 1991 and the Internet since 1999; however, the press is treated no differently and global media appear to have been ignored as there have been only minor alterations to printing regulations. Although foreign investors and companies have had access to the Saudi market since 2005, they cannot invest in the media industry which remains under the aegis of the MoCI rather than the Saudi General Investment Authority or the Ministry of Trade. The MoCI owns all state radio and TV channels and prohibits individuals or companies from investing in them and will not issue any new newspaper licenses. As a result, some Saudi entrepreneurs have established satellite TV channels and newspapers abroad.

2.4.3 Executive Regulations for Electronic Publication (EREP)

This is a recent addition to publishing laws in the KSA in 2011. Although not promulgated by Royal Decree, these regulations were issued by the MoCI to regulate the online and media market and digital publishing in response to what was perceived to be the chaos of unregulated online publishing. When these were issued there were reportedly around 2,000 online-only news publications. This law consists of 13 articles that regulate key online activities including licensing requirements, definitions of online publishing terms, allegations relating to online content and cybercrime, while other articles cover procedures and standards in online publishing (Alqarni, 2013).

The Director of Electronic Media at the MoCI, Tareq Alkhatrawi, argued that most online-only newspapers are owned by individuals who often lack adequate funding or journalistic experience. Of the 2,000 online-only news publications reported in 2011, only 750 had been licensed four years after the EREP came into force (Alkhatrawi, 2015). Many of these online-only publications have already closed or are considering closure due to both the enforcement of EREP and business difficulties, resulting in a decline in Saudi journalistic enterprises. In spite of this, these news providers still play an important role in the Saudi media market as they outnumber traditional news outlets (Alzaharani, 2016). Originally, one of the central reasons for Saudis' interest in online press was the fast rate of news delivery and information exchange (Aba Numai, 2009).

EREP can be used to limit access to news that relates to PI issues and reduces the number of people who can be involved in journalism or e-newspapers. This has led to SM becoming a popular alternative platform for Saudis wishing to express their opinions and alert fellow citizens to issues that relate to the public interest.

The 2016 Freedom House Report notes that if an issue is discussed on Twitter this frequently puts pressure on traditional news media to report on stories that might otherwise have been deemed 'too sensitive'. Figure 0.7 shows press freedom ratings for the KSA as gauged by Freedom House in 2016. The same report comments that all the privately owned Saudi daily newspapers are all owned by people connected to the royal family, while terrestrial TV and radio stations are all government-owned. In spite of satellite dishes being officially illegal, regional satellite channels such as *Al-Arabiya* are popular. Such channels are however controlled by Saudi investors who require they follow media regulations. Similarly, other sources of foreign news popular with an Arab readership such as the London-based dailies *Asharq al-Aswat* and *Al-Hayat* are owned by the Saudi royal family (Freedom House Report, 2017). Furthermore, although the Saudi government has been shown to directly censor media both locally and internationally, the prevailing climate of control means that journalists also practice self-censorship and are wary of criticising the royal family, Islam or the religious authorities. Indeed, the power of these authorities and the religious concerns of citizens is a powerful force in shaping freedom of expression; as is the general pressure of traditional norms and values and the fact that historically female voices and the voices of minorities have not been given space in the media (Alnajraniet *al.*, 2018).

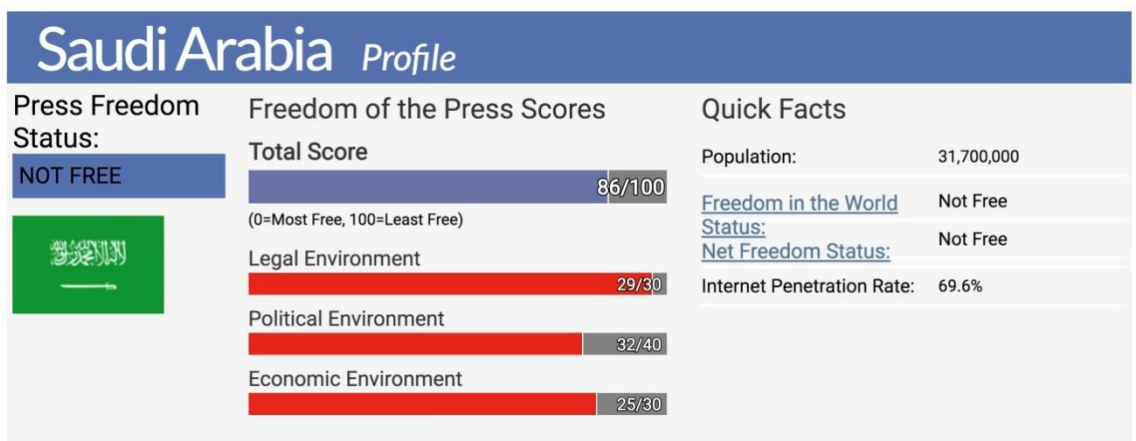


Figure 0.7: Overview of the KSA Freedom of the Press scores (Freedom House report, 2017)

2.4.4 Press Establishment Law (PEL)

The PEL directly deals with the most significant media laws as it covers the central structure of newspapers, organisational practices and business models, and therefore merits detailed attention. It consists of 30 articles grouped into six parts and has been agreed by the Bureau of Experts.¹²

Part one of the PEL deals with the requirements for obtaining media licences which are needed for any mass media activities in the KSA, ranging from the establishment of newspapers to policy-making. Part two consists of two articles which explain the requirements needed to become a member of the Saudi press. Part three is comprised of seven articles dealing with the Saudi Council of Ministers and the Board of Directors and financial issues relating to newspaper companies. Part four is made up of nine articles stipulating the standards and responsibilities expected from journalistic activities, with Article 22 being of particular significance for this research since it specifies the role of editors and the standards expected of them. The fifth part relates to dissolution and liquidation of a press company; while the sixth deals with general issues related to journalism; such as the withdrawal of a licence to publish. Article 27 refers to the fact that the Saudi Journalists Association is an independent legal association responsible for the executive regulation of Saudi journalism and for defending journalists' rights.

- In 2016, according to GaStat, the Ministry of Media had licensed 757 electronic newspapers and 14 print newspapers. Since then, the number of electronic newspapers has been reduced to 660, and the number of print newspapers to 13, following the closure of the *Makkah* newspaper. Government intervention to rescue the newspaper industry was expected by editor-in-chief of the *Al-Jazirah* newspaper, Khaled Al-Malik, who is also Chairman of the Saudi Journalists Association. Industry sources believe that although the print newspapers represent only 1.9% of the Saudi media, they still have credibility among their readers because they maintain high standards of professionalism. Nevertheless, new readers,

¹² This group, which forms part of the Council of Ministers, produced a seven-volume compendium of Saudi laws which was highly appreciated by legal experts and interested parties within the KSA and abroad. A digital version of this compendium can now be browsed and searched easily by the Council of Ministers.

especially belonging to the younger population, propend towards electronic media, which has grown rapidly in the past few years (GaStat Report, 2019).

2.4.5 Cyber-Crimes Committed by SM Users in the KSA

The Anti-Cyber Crime Law (ACCL) was approved by Royal Decree (M/17) in 2007 partly in response to the growth of SM and the resulting increase in cyber crimes like defamation, blackmail, supporting terrorism, and account hacking. Cyber crimes are defined as any illegal activity that is “committed by using a computer or the Internet”, and the ACCL aims to secure the safe exchange of data and protect the rights of users, PI, public morals and citizens’ privacy. It identifies a number of cyber crimes that are specifically related to SM, gives each a specific penalty and outlines procedures for making a complaint. These cyber crimes are grouped according to seriousness (and thus severity of penalty) as follows:

Group A (the least severe) includes gaining illegal access to someone’s computer for reasons of coercion or blackmail (often through SM); defamation by means of SM and taking unauthorized pictures and videos of someone with a cell phone. Group A cyber crimes carry a penalty of one year’s imprisonment (or less) and/or a fine of not more than 500,000 Riyals. Victims have to report the crime, which is then investigated by the Saudi Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution. Victims may demand damages or compensation.

Group B cyber crimes include hacking a SM account and preventing or obstructing access to it. This crime incurs a penalty of prison for a term not exceeding four years and/or a fine not exceeding three million Riyals. (The complaints procedure is as above).

Group C cyber crimes relate to the ‘Transmission, publication or storage of material that is inconsistent with public order or morality, religious values or which breaches the privacy of a natural person’ and include insulting the Saudi government (considered an offence against public order), posting pornography, and promoting or facilitating the use of drugs. These crimes incur penalties of a prison term not exceeding five years and/or a fine not exceeding three million Riyals. These crimes are usually reported by authorities at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Bureau of Experts, 2007).

2.5 ICT in the KSA

2.5.1 Twitter and Freedom of Expression in the KSA

In his book *Twitter Culture: Freedom of Expression or Responsibility of Expression*,¹³ Saudi media academic, Al Ghothami (2016) draws on his analysis of the ten most followed accounts on Twitter in Saudi Arabia in order to explore the ways in which Saudis make use of Twitter.

According to Al Ghothami, “tweeters are being liberated of all forms of control, even self-control” (2016, p.6). He argues that Twitter has provided a space in which users are totally free to express themselves, highlighting the fact that tweeters can make use of pseudonyms or fake pictures in their accounts. (It is important to note that Al Ghothami’s book was published in 2016 before the Saudi government began to impose tighter restrictions on online activities). He contrasts the freedom of expression on Twitter with that found in the traditional media in the Arab world as a result of institutional control, illustrating this with the story of an Algerian cartoonist who told his newspaper’s editor-in-chief about an idea he had for an artwork and was then reported by him to the police and put on trial for insulting the president (Al Ghothami, 2016).

In his study which focuses on the topics discussed in Saudi SM, Almakenzy (2015) found that social issues were most popular including unemployment and job seeking, health, and information judged to be of public concern, for example, postings about a patient being infected with AIDS as a result of a blood transfusion at Jazan General Hospital, in southern KSA.

2.5.1.1 The Nature of Followers on Twitter in the KSA

Al Ghothami notes that although a single Twitter account in the Arab world can attract millions of followers, large numbers of these may not interact with the account holder. The remaining followers can be divided into three types. The first are supportive of the account holder’s views and interact positively with these. Al Ghothami describes another group frequently found on Twitter as *a/*

¹³ This is the researcher’s own translation of the original Arabic title. All the quotes in this section were also translated by the researcher.

raaht (stooges). They blindly follow influential tweeters and consider them to be their model. They are willing to use all means to suppress critics or anyone who opposes the opinions of their favourite tweeter. This group is found in those accounts that tend to create strong reactions and their re-tweets of what the account holder writes tend to fall into two categories:

1. Excusing the account holder's mistakes as good traits to be thankful for.
2. Offering a show of unquestioning support to the account holder.

On his hashtag #AlGhothami_evaluates_BinSaid_andAlAlSheikh,¹⁴ Al Ghothami analyses examples from the Twitter accounts of these two well-known Saudi figures, commenting:

In his account, Bin Said was dealing with my criticism by re-tweeting and recalling my past tweets. This had a clear effect of motivating his *raaht* and urging them to reply. I was surprised at the intensity of the contributions compared to the neutrality of the hashtag title. Al Al Sheikh's *raaht* were completely absent and he was the sole loser of this event. As the day went on I began to think that #Ghothami_evaluates_BinSaid_andAlAlSheikh had been created by Bin Said's *raaht* only to discover in the evening, through a tweet by Mohammed Najaa Ghallab, that it was his hashtag. He mentioned that he was not a Bin Said supporter. Therefore, this demonstrated how Bin Said's *raaht* were able to invade and take over the hashtag completely and even eliminate any presence of Al Al Sheikh (their strongest rival). This shows that the power of large numbers is the *raaht*'s greatest force. This happened to Al Al Sheikh's *raaht* (2016, p 121).

Some follow these sheikhs to learn from them; others do so merely out of curiosity. A third group of followers respond critically to their tweets. However, in comparison to the massive numbers of followers the number of re-tweets is small (in the hundreds). It seems that these followers leave no trace since re-tweeting is the key indicator of interaction, showing agreement with tweets or re-tweeting these at times. Sometimes a tweet may be used for spreading information or even for criticising the account holder. At times, the numbers of

¹⁴ This hashtag was tweeted four days after Al Ghothami published an article entitled "Critique of Twitter Discourse" in which he cites tweets posted on both men's accounts. Professor Ahmed bin Rashid bin Said is an academic in the Department of Media, King bin Saud University, Riyadh. Mohammed bin Abdul Lateef Al Al Sheikh is a columnist for *Aljazeera* newspaper. Both are prominent Twitter users with a large group of followers and both interact with tweets on an instant basis. Any tweet by either of them causes large-scale rivalry between their followers as in the example above.

re-tweets from supporters and comments from opponents are fairly similar, numbering in the hundreds. Much larger numbers of followers are silent non-reactors. This means that Saudi clergymen have little interaction with either supporters or opponents (see below). Also, the trends relating to the account's figures for followers are inconsistent, since they include opinions that may be supportive, questioning or oppositional (Al Gothami, 2016).

Al Ghothami found that Islamic clergymen topped the list with millions of followers, accounting for more than 60% of users. Although at first glance this suggests that these men have many supporters, in reality these followers consist of several categories.

This shows that the original image of the sheikh as a Twitter super-figure with millions of religious followers has been replaced by followers who are not necessarily admiring devotees but may merely be curious on-lookers or actively oppositional. They represent a broader and more realistic cultural mix, not an ideological bloc attesting to the sheikh's holiness and guaranteeing him immunity. This new situation has resulted in some followers occasionally making critical remarks while others continue to respond to the sheikh's tweets positively.

2.5.1.2 Twitter and the Image of Religious Leaders

The KSA is an Islamic nation and, therefore, the clergy enjoy a privileged social status and rank and are highly respected. In part this is due to their knowledge of Islamic theology and *shariah*, an independent area of knowledge with its own educational institutions, methodology, and distinct form of discourse. However, this is also due to historical and cultural factors specific to the Saudi context, and in part to traditional Arab social values and customs (Al Dakheel, 2006).

Twitter has significantly changed public perceptions of influential figures in Saudi society (religious readers). When logging into Twitter, followers are eager to discover what is new in the accounts of certain figures and analysis shows that they often express their disappointment using phrases such as "You let me down", "You've changed your view", "You're not what we thought you were", and "If I'd known this was your opinion, I wouldn't have followed you". Such comments indicate that Twitter has changed the image of religious

leaders in Saudi society and their alleged holiness has been replaced with human reality. These people are not gods (Al Gothami, 2016).

Twitter has revealed the changes in popularity that some Saudi religious figures have experienced. Sheikh Salman Al Ouda¹⁵ was a prominent figure in the Islamic *Sahwa* [literally, awakening] movement in the 1980s. After becoming a media figure on Arab satellite channels, he gradually started to change. When Twitter appeared, he opened an account, gaining a large following. He was very active but avoided direct clashes with anyone. He gradually started to express more moderate opinions and became more open to contemporary politics and religious norms. People began to treat Al Ouda as an independent intellectual rather than a figure from the Islamic awakening. In a tweet, Abdullah Al Uteibi noted that “the nicest thing about Al Ouda’s account is that you can criticize him and not be insulted by his followers”. Here, he is comparing his account with others such as that of another Saudi religious leader, Sheikh Mohammed Al Ereifi, whose followers insult anyone who tweets against him. Both men have millions of followers but the first has an open mind while the second ensures that his followers protect him from any criticism.

Saudi clerics generally share a common social and political goal, namely, to uphold Salafism, a movement built on a coalition between Islam and political rule. The first Saudi state was established in 1934 by Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdel Wahhab and Imam Mohammed bin Saud under the leadership of Abdel Aziz bin Abdel Rahman Al Saud, representing the religious and political authorities of the new state, and this relationship between the ruling Al Saud family and religious authorities continues to be strong to this day.

Many clerics benefit from their positions and relations with state officials to enhance their power and status. They act as advisors to government officials but there are occasions when clerics and state do not concur, for example, the Council of Senior Scholars issued a *fatwa* in late October 2010 prohibiting women from obtaining employment in stores after the Ministry of Labour had passed legislation allowing this in August of the same year (Al Shweikh, 2013).

¹⁵ A cleric and Muslim scholar, Al-Ouda is on the Board of Trustees of the International Union for Muslim Scholars. He is also editor of the Arabic edition of the website Islam Today, appears on several TV shows and writes newspaper articles.

Decade after decade, both the religious and political authorities in Saudi Arabia have worked side by side to strengthen their roots in the Saudi society.

However, the current Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has presented himself as a modernizer and stressed his openness to activities previously prohibited in the KSA such as music, arts, cinema and museums. Some authors, such as Al Innabi (2017), suggest that for this reason clerics are now re-interpreting the rules and describing Mohammed bin Salman's innovations as necessities. The most recent example of this is the shift in opinions on women's driving in the KSA on the grounds. Here, it was argued that the change should be permitted since it would reduce the use of a private male driver to transport women. This illustrates that religion can be used for political ends (Al Innabi, 2017).

2.5.1.3 The Significance of Making Hashtag Trends in the KSA

Al Ghothami argues that particular themes or images of individuals can be created through hashtags which allow the whole society to express its needs, criticize an individual or defame someone. Al Ghothami elaborated on this by saying:

The Twitter age will enhance this idea and reveal it for all to see with the help of Twitter accounts. All individuals will create their own image and try to reinforce it through the hashtag. The phrase 'I will hashtag you' has become a threat by anyone wanting to defame or offend someone else.

The hashtags in Al Ghothami's sample had two main features:

1. They were repeated many times by different accounts day after day.
2. They included many fake accounts which tweeted harsh insults and bad language (Al Ghotami, 2016).

2.5.1.4 The Power of Twitter in the KSA

Al Ghothami (2016) stated that, in the KSA, Twitter is stronger than traditional journalism because it diminishes the power of the elite. In saying this, he refers to the many examples of political, religious, and public figures who found themselves forced to post apologies on Twitter after facing angry responses from Twitter users. It can be argued, though, that public apologies are not

necessarily a reduction in power as much as they are an increase in accountability.

Some Twitter-related events in Saudi Arabia even led to the imprisonment of some users as a result of public outrage. Typically these are related to criticism of the authorities or to religion. When a moderately religious young Saudi, Hamza Kashghari, appeared to be addressing the Prophet Muhammad as his friend in his tweets, many thought he was crossing some Islamic red lines. After realizing his mistake, he admitted he was wrong and asked his followers to understand his position by tweeting “Do not help the devil deceive me”. He then decided to close his account and leave the country. However, strong reactions by Twitter users led to his arrest and imprisonment on the grounds of not showing due respect to the Prophet Muhammad.

Turki Al Hamad¹⁶ called for the modernization of religious discourse in Saudi Arabia several times on his Twitter account. In one tweet he called for the need to update “Muhammad’s doctrine” which was taken out of context since confused readers thought he was referring to changing Islamic beliefs rather than Islamic discourse. Tweets calling for him to be punished led to his arrest. After his release, Al Hamad began explaining his opinion in televised interviews. Similarly, when Hossa Al Al Sheikh (a columnist for the Saudi newspaper *Al-Watan*) compared a singer’s voice to that of God, Twitter users were outraged and demanded she be held accountable. The next day, Al Al Sheikh issued a statement explaining that the tweet was not hers as her account had been hacked. She thus saved herself from legal accountability and her account disappeared, putting an end to the issue.

These incidents suggests that what happens on Twitter can set the agenda for Saudi media priorities with newspapers covering stories and events based on tweets (see 0). They also show that the general discourse on Twitter in the KSA is religious in nature with many accounts having an Islamic orientation. Al Ghothami differentiates between those which are “truly Islamic” (accounts belonging to Muslims who are sincere in their religious beliefs) and “fake Islamic” (accounts held by people or organisations who are using Islam to further a political agenda). Thus, opposing ideas on Islamic jurisprudence

¹⁶ He is a Saudi political analyst, journalist, and novelist.

issues can be found among many users. Each group relies on its own exegesis, applying this to problematic issues while also arguing to disapprove of their opponents' opinions. This happens to anyone raising issues such as women's driving or providing Saudis with scholarships to study in the UK and USA.

Al Ghothami notes that cases of controversies and engagement levels leading to so-called Twitterstorms¹⁷ happen all over the world. For example, the British Member of Parliament, Michael Fabricant, tweeted about a female journalist saying he wanted to punch her in the throat. This caused uproar in the media and on Twitter and led to him apologizing, saying that he wrote the tweet while in the dentist's chair. The discussion on Twitter then calmed down (Al Ghothami, 2016). In another case, Justine Sacco, Vice President of Communications at Match Group, tweeted: "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding, I'm white!" This led to huge anger among tweeters so she deleted the tweet and apologized (Srinivas, 2013).

2.5.1.5 Twitter's Ability to Polarise Opinions

The phenomenon of divided opinions is widely evident in the KSA. Al Ghothami argues that this partisanship relates to personal opinions only and not ideological stances, noting that independent thinking is rare. Neutral independent Twitter users are drawn by other users to support their favourite groups. Those who refuse face angry reactions and loathing, as if neutrality was a crime. This was particularly evident recently in responses to the Qatar crisis, as discussed below.

Al Ghothami also observes that due to the development of political events in the Arab world, anyone who chooses to criticize the Islamic Brotherhood Movement, for example, or the Shiite Iranian bloc in any shape or form, including Saudi citizens, can become a target for criticism. The rivalry between these two groups intensifies or lessens according to changes in political events. This tension varies to the extent that groups/individuals who have previously

¹⁷ A Twitterstorm is the term used to refer to a sudden increase in activity on this social media site in relation to a particular topic. It is often initiated by one individual posting a message to followers about breaking news or a controversial issue. This tweet spreads rapidly as a particular hashtag is used in subsequent tweets and retweets.

viewed themselves as having a common cause may suddenly find themselves in opposing camps on the basis of such shifts in allegiance.

During the Qatar crisis,¹⁸ some influential Saudi figures continued to tweet during the attack by the Gulf States on Qatar whereas others refrained or even closed their accounts completely, offering a range of excuses for this. For example: the Saudi religious leader, Sheikh Badr Al Amer, tweeted: "Peace be upon you. I would like to say that I have stopped writing on Twitter and all other internet sites indefinitely. May God protect us all". The Saudi lawyer, Dr. Omar Al Migbil, also tweeted: "To those who have honoured me with their following, I would like to say that I will not be tweeting for an indefinite time as I will be busy with scientific research. I ask God to bless us all wherever we are". Sheikh Saed Al Bureik, a well-known preacher in Saudi Arabia, deleted his Twitter account completely.

Another lawyer, Dr. Ibrahim Al Mdamegh, tweeted his decision to close his Twitter account, bidding farewell to his followers by posting:

I would like to thank Twitter for giving me the opportunity during the past five years to express my ideas about many issues happening in my society. I have talked about religion, life, the state, politics, reform, rights, liberties, development and public affairs. I cannot assume that all my opinions were fully correct but I tried my best. However, due to some misconceptions regarding some of my views I now see that it is in my and my family's best interests to leave Twitter by deleting my account. This decision is totally personal and voluntary and I have taken it to prevent any similar future misconceptions.

He concluded his tweet by thanking his followers and all those who interacted with him and gave him advice.

¹⁸ The 2017–18 Qatar diplomatic crisis began when several countries abruptly severed diplomatic relations with Qatar on 5 June 2017. These countries included the KSA, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt, all of which withdrew their diplomats or downgraded diplomatic relations. The governments of the UAE and the KSA announced that expressing support for Qatar or publishing pro-Qatar material on social network websites would be considered illegal. The UAE announced that anyone found guilty would face 15 years' imprisonment plus a fine of half a million of UAE dirhams. In the Saudi case, lawbreakers faced up to five years' imprisonment plus a fine of up to three million Saudi riyals.

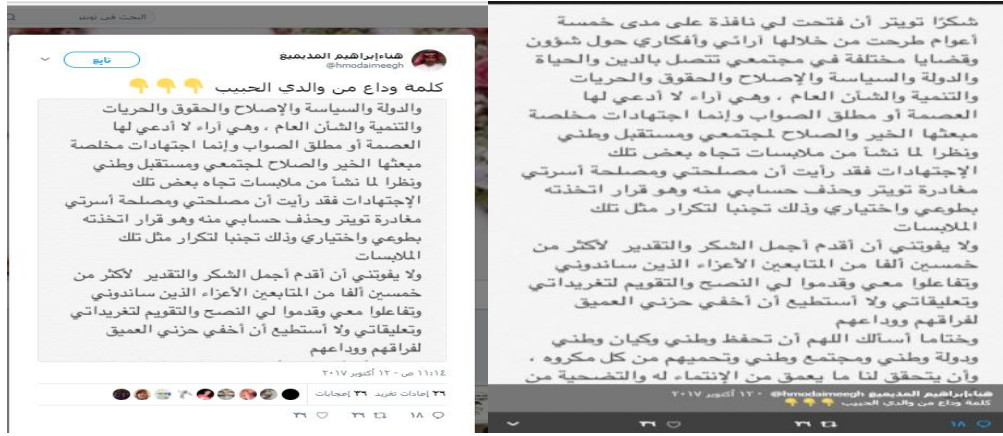


Figure 0.8: Last post by Al Mdamegh explaining his decision to close his account

Sheikh Abdullah Al Shehri, an expert on Islamic doctrine and comparative religion, also announced his decision to stop tweeting on his account. When his surprised followers asked for an explanation, especially since this decision coincided with the Qatar crisis, he justified his decision by saying he was busy with other work.



Figure 0.9: Alsheheri's tweet explaining his decision to take a break from Twitter



Figure 0.10: Tweets querying whether research was the real reason for the absence of clerics from Twitter

Some activists voiced their opinion that some preachers and influential individuals might “have received instructions to stop tweeting” (Hassen: online, 2017) for reasons relating to the Qatar crisis.



Figure 0.11: Users announcing their intention to stop tweeting temporarily

Other examples of Twitter usage clearly show that Saudi society expresses its opinions in an extreme way, with users either expressing their uncritical acceptance of ideas completely or their total rejection.

Freedom of expression has always been restricted in the KSA. However, Saudis are now expected to actively promote official state narratives on Twitter and those who fail to defend the Saudi leadership are viewed as potentially disloyal. The government continues to closely monitor platforms such as Twitter in order to ensure the spread of pro-government propaganda on social media and prevent dissenting opinions being voiced (Al-Jaber, 2018).

Controlling what is said on Twitter is a problem for the Saudi government as it lies outside its jurisdiction. There are however, increasing covert attempts to control conversations on Twitter and other SM platforms using ‘bot’ (robot) networks and ‘troll farms’, some of which are suspected to be state-backed. In the case of Saudi Arabia, there is recent evidence of this in Arabic hashtags expressing support for Crown Prince¹⁹ Mohammed Bin Salman and condemning the news organisation Al Jazeera in relation to the death of Jamal Khashoggi.²⁰ On October 14 2018, Ben Nimmo (Information Defence Fellow at the Atlantic Council) analysed the hashtag ‘We all have trust in Mohammed Bin

¹⁹ Prince Muhammad bin Salman is the deputy prime minister of the KSA and chairman of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs.

²⁰ Mr Khashoggi, a well-known journalist and critic of the Saudi government, was murdered, after he was seen entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2 2018.

Salman' that trended at 250,000 tweets, with the vast majority being re-tweets, which can be a sign of bot activity (see Figure 0.12). Long-dormant accounts were suddenly tweeting again, posting identical or near-identical material to other suspicious accounts (Bell and Coleman, 2018)

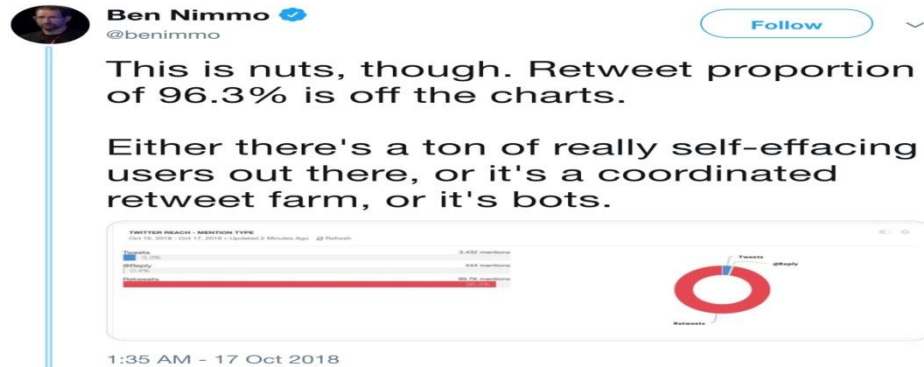
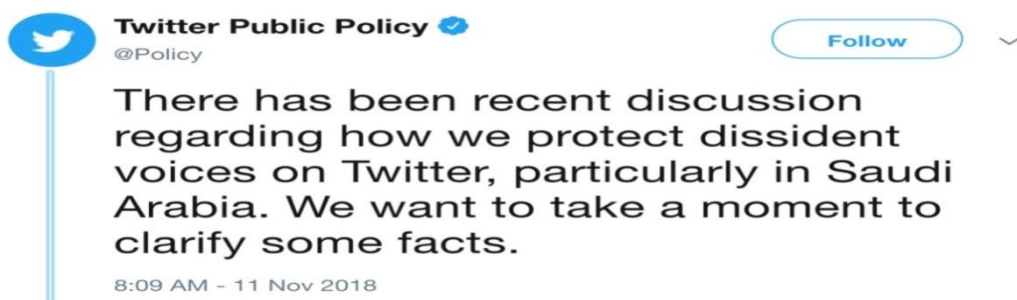


Figure 0.12: Bots feed Saudi support after disappearance (Bell and Coleman, 2018)

After actions such as this, it is debatable whether the Saudi authorities control what is posted on Twitter. The government of Saudi Arabia has been accused of using Twitter to direct public opinion. Twitter has rejected accusations of being responsible for endangering the lives of dissenters, especially in Saudi Arabia, after many recent reports were issued about that government using companies to find out information about dissenters whose lives were subsequently put at risk. In November 2018, Twitter issued a series of statements using its authorized official account (see figure 2.13).



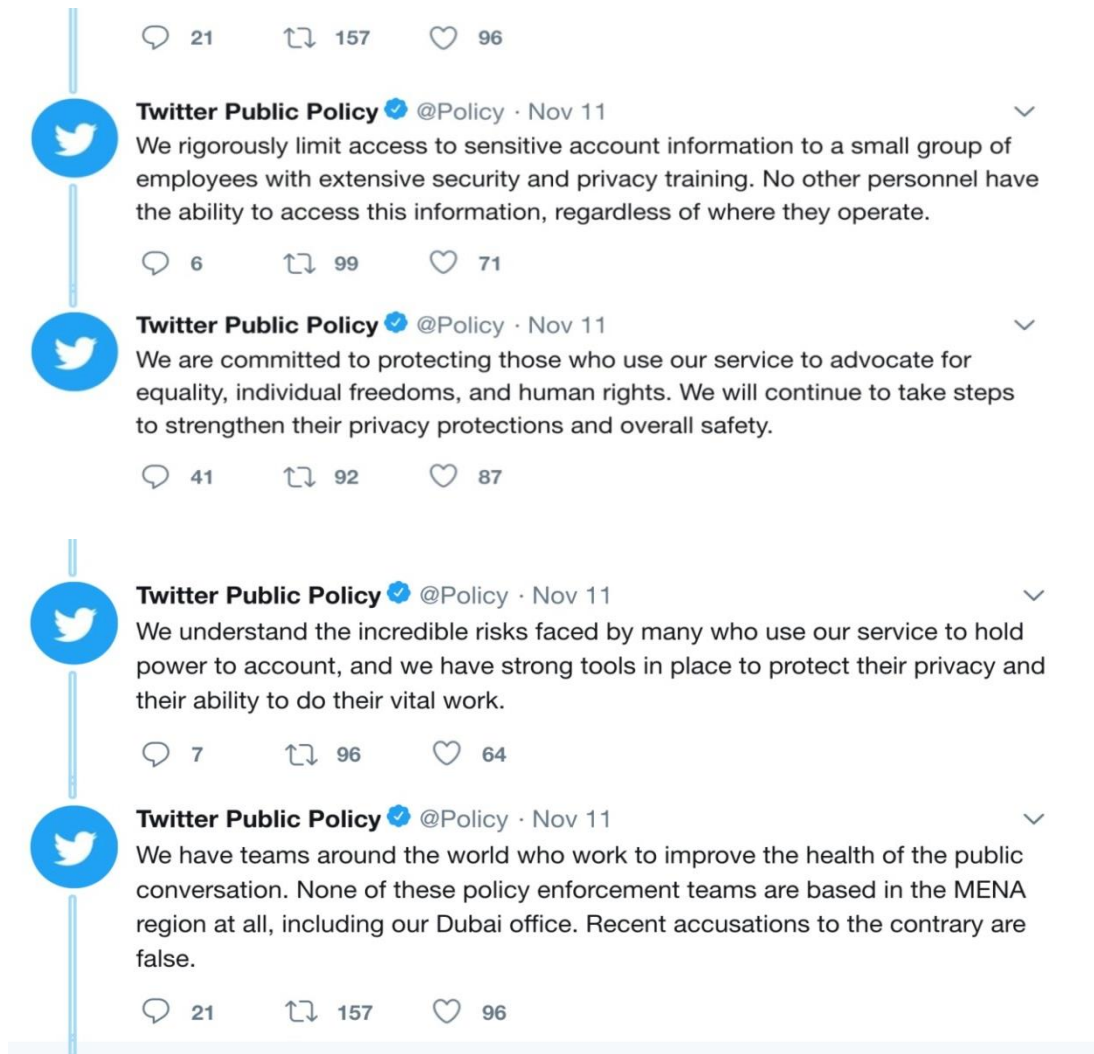


Figure 0.13: Images of Twitter’s public policy’s tweets (Alaraby, 2018)

Nevertheless, the fact that Saudi government agencies do monitor what is said on Twitter was admitted as far back as February 2013 by the Minister of Information, who also noted that this was a very difficult task owing to the vast number of users. Technical filtering mechanisms have so far failed to stem the flood of tweets from Saudi users and the resultant widening of the range of public debate and the exchange of information among citizens. In addition, non-technical controls seem to operate, as many Saudi Twitter users may refrain from posting controversial tweets or hide their true identities (Noman *et al.*, 2015). Evidence of self-censorship can be seen in actions like the voluntary removal of tweets describing the Egyptian army’s removal of President Morsi in 2013 as a ‘military coup’ so as not to clash with government support for the Egyptian military (*ibid*).

Out of the almost 25 million total active social media users in the KSA, 18 million people (constituting 72% of all social media users nation-wide) use mobile devices. Facebook was replaced by YouTube in 2018 as the most popular social media platform in the KSA, with 23.62 million active users against the 21.95 million users of Facebook. Instagram comes in third, with 17.96 million users, and Twitter is fourth, with 17.29 million users (which is the highest number of Twitter users in the MENA region). Lastly, Google+ is the fifth most popular social media platform, with 10.64 million users (Gmi_blogger, 2018).

This research proposes that in a civic culture where civil servants and politicians are interested in how individuals can better participate in their civic duties and accept authority in order to maintain political stability, Twitter may provide a platform for the distribution of information and creation of a public sphere in which a more democratic debate may occur in the way envisaged by Habermas. More details are provided in Chapter 3.4.

2.6 Royal Decrees, Hashtags 2015-2016, and Economic Issues in the KSA

Royal Decrees are orders announced by the Saudi monarch that are broadcast in the official state-owned media and are considered to have the highest legislative authority in the KSA. They are issued in a specific form signed by the Saudi monarch, in his role as head of state and about subjects not presented to the Council of Ministers or *Shura*. Two hashtags appeared in 2015 and 2016 respectively, both referred to as #Royal Decrees, and these played an important role in Saudis' lives. The context for 2015 is different from that of 2016 and in order to understand them both, a brief review of what these Royal Decrees were and why they were issued is provided below.

2.6.1 Details of Relevant Royal Decrees 2015

Following the crowning of the new Saudi monarch, King Salman bin AbdelAziz in January 2015, a number of economic decisions changed the face of the Kingdom's economy. Within the space of a year, these decisions paved the way to resolving some of Saudi citizens' most important problems and helped to support state institutions. According to the analysis carried out by the economic reports unit of *Al Eqtisadiyah*, the Saudi newspaper specializing in economics

affairs, King Salman's Royal Decrees focused on dealing with the challenges facing the KSA.

Among the most significant economic decisions made by King Salman was the levying of an annual tax of 2.5% of the market value of unused land located within urban areas. This was intended to solve the housing crisis that has been facing Saudi citizens for years. In a meeting led by King Salman on 23 November 2015, the Saudi Cabinet agreed to the introduction of the so-called White Lands Tax, which included the following provisions:

- The levying of an annual tax on all land that could be used for housing or commercial housing within urban areas owned by one or more persons of regardless of status.
- The rate of tax payable was to be 2.5% of the land's value.
- Executive regulations were to determine land value, the timetable for the staggered implementation of the tax and the necessary regulations required to ensure fair implementation of the tax and prevention of tax evasion

The White Lands Tax hashtag is discussed in Chapter 5.

The terms of the new tax required that money raised from tax and tax evasion penalties be deposited in a special account overseen by SAMA. This money was to be used to pay for housing projects and appropriate public utilities and to provide public services for these areas. The Ministry of Housing was ordered to prepare these executive regulations after due consultation with concerned parties and secure a Cabinet decision within 180 days of their issuance. The order was to be implemented within 180 days of its announcement in the state press.

King Salman also issued two Royal Decrees to tackle the KSA's economic challenges. The first, issued on 30 January 2015, made provisions for the formation of an Economic Affairs Council with responsibility for improving the performance, accountability and cooperation of all government bodies. This council of 21 ministers was to be chaired by Cabinet member, Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdel Aziz. Among its tasks was determining strategic objectives related to economic affairs and development. It was also required to revise as necessary economic and development strategies and

plans and to follow up and coordinate their implementation. The Council's secretariat consisted of consultants and experts with links to the General Secretariat of the Cabinet. A Project Management Office was also to be established and based at the General Secretariat of the Cabinet. It was tasked with ensuring the commitment of all concerned parties to the implementation of *Vision 2030* objectives and with project follow-up implemented by those parties. This Council was intended to maintain a strategic vision, streamline decision making on economic issues and prevent conflicts of interest among concerned ministries.

The King also issued a decision establishing a new government agency tasked with creating jobs for Saudi citizens facing unemployment, as this had reached 11.7% before he ascended to the throne in 2015, the Cabinet, chaired by King Salman, agreed to the establishment of the Job Creation and Combating Unemployment Agency under the aegis of the Economic Affairs Council. As its title suggests, it assumes responsibility for job creation and reducing unemployment in the Kingdom by coordinating governmental and private employers, developing employment generating sectors and investing in the competitive advantage of the KSA's regions. The management board was to consist of a chairman appointed by the head of the Cabinet, an agency governor (to be appointed by the agency's management board) and representatives of relevant government and non-government agencies and the private sector.

The second Royal Decree aimed at tackling the KSA's economic challenges involved decreasing fuel subsidies to deal with abnormalities in the Saudi economy and diversify state resources, with the aim of reducing the KSA's dependency on oil as the only source of income, especially with declining prices. This change to the subsidies system in the KSA is one of its most important economic reforms. The Ministry of Finance announced on 28 December 2015 that it would make changes to the subsidy system for water, electricity and oil products, raising prices over a five-year period. These reforms were intended to reduce pressure on the national budget while at the same time encouraging more efficient and responsible energy consumption, preserving natural resources, preventing waste and promoting a more competitive business sector. Negative impacts on average and low income citizens were to

be minimized. Prices of fuel, water and electricity in the KSA were among the lowest in the world before the large government subsidies were cut. Even after amendments, prices remain low in comparison with regional and global levels. Estimates indicate that subsidies to energy prices cost the Saudi government approximately 61 billion dollars in 2015, some 9.3% of the GDP (Ekrami, 2016).

A report by Moody's Agency for Monetary Policy published on 11 January 2016 noted that:

The series of reforms on fuel prices are positive for the monetary categorization of the state. They lower current spending and enhance governmental financial resources affected by deteriorating global oil prices. They also limit the total economic abnormalities of the Saudi economy (p.3).

The same report argued that the effect of cutting fuel subsidies on inflation rates in the KSA would be moderate as energy products only form 3.3% of the Saudi household budget and added that 'The benefits of cutting fuel subsidies would increase with any rise in oil prices in the future' (ibid., p.3).

Ordinary Saudi citizens were not forgotten in the King's Royal Decrees since he also sanctioned a series of one-off bonus payments to citizens on average and low incomes, amounting to 88 million riyals from the treasury. This included payment of a two-month salary to all civil and military Saudi state employees, a two-month allowance to all public education students inside the Kingdom and abroad, a two-month pension payment for all retired citizens, a two-month allowance to beneficiaries of social security and a two-month subsidy bonus to the disabled.

Another major change which took place was the opening up of the KSA to foreign investment. The Saudi Minister of Trade and Industry and the General Investment Authority Governor confirmed the KSA's commitment to allowing foreign companies to invest in wholesale trade and retail business sectors at ownership ratios higher than those to which the KSA is committed to by the World Trade Organization. These ownership ratios can reach up to 100% in accordance with conditions and regulations to be determined by concerned parties. This followed a statement made in King Salman's speech at the Investment Forum in Washington in which he directed both the Saudi Ministry of Trade and the Investment Authority to study trade and investment systems in order to facilitate the work of international companies and provide them with

incentives, including direct access to Saudi markets for those wishing to invest in the KSA. These companies are expected to provide manufacturing plans and programmes with set timetables, transferring technological know-how, employment and training to Saudi citizens (Ekrami, 2016).

This important step came after the state allowed qualified foreign investors to invest directly in Saudi stocks. Opening up the Saudi stock market to foreign investors has five main objectives: Firstly, it would enhance institutional investment in the Saudi stock market in order to stabilize the market and limit fluctuations. This would involve attracting specialized investors who would bring their experience to the local market and have long range investment goals. Secondly, these high-level specialized professional experts would pass on knowledge and experience to local financial institutions and investors and raise the professionalism of participants in the Saudi financial market. Thirdly, this in turn, would raise performance levels of specialized investment companies and listed companies, especially regarding disclosure of financial information. Fourthly, moreover, it would enhance the position of the Saudi stock market and raise the possibility of increasing its global ranking to the status of an emerging market according to global classification standards, especially the Morgan Stanley Capital International Index which many markets seek to reach. Finally, it would raise the level of studies, research and evaluation of the market in general, and of the listed companies in particular. This would provide all clients with more accurate information and better evaluations (Ekrami, 2016).



Figure 0.14 An infographic listing the most important economic decisions included in the hashtag #Royal_Decrees on 29 January 2015 (Ekrami, 2016)

2.6.2 Details of the Relevant Royal Decrees 2016

King Salman bin Abdel Aziz issued a number of Royal Decrees that cut the salaries and benefits enjoyed by ministers and members of the *Shura* Council and reduced the allowances paid to state employees as a result of the economic crisis facing the region following the decline in oil revenues. These Royal Decrees were aimed at reducing government spending.

1. Ministerial salaries were to be cut by 20%. Other benefits paid to *Shura* members together with their annual allowances for the purposes of housing and furniture were all to be cut by 15%. All other benefits paid to *Shura* members for cars, drivers and maintenance during their four-year term of office were also to be cut. A number of other allowances and benefits paid to both Saudi and non-Saudi government employees were discontinued. Only troops participating in operations close to Saudi's southern borders and abroad were exempted.
2. All annual bonuses for 2017 and any benefits usually awarded to government employees on renewal, extension, continuance or renewal of their contracts were not to be paid
3. All the financial allowances, rewards and bonuses stipulated²¹ were to be cancelled.
4. Other items relating to allowances and rewards were also to be cancelled as follows:
 - Allowances paid for the following jobs: computer typist; data registrar; treasury secretary; payment employee; head treasurer; warden; communications technician.
 - Risk allowance paid to those working in potentially hazardous environments
 - Bonus for employees excelling in training courses held within the KSA.
 - Clothing allowance stipulated in the regulations for diplomatic posts.
 - Annual leave allowances paid for employees in public institutions and agencies.

²¹ A table listing these in full was appended to the Royal Decree.

- Travel allowances stipulated in the regulations of the Communications and Information Technology Commission.
 - Assignment allowance for employees given official tasks outside their workplace and travel allowance for them and accompanying family members as stipulated in employee regulations of the Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.
 - Monthly bonus stipulated in the employee regulations of the Public Institution for Social Security.
 - Monthly allowance provided for members of the Military Industries Corporation.
 - The scarcity of specialization bonus stipulated in the regulations of the Commission for Tourism and National Heritage and the Public Investment Fund.
 - Allowances for standing committee members paid in return for attendance at meetings held within working hours to those covered by regulations relevant to Saudi university staff including lecturers and the like and the regulations relevant to trainers employed at the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation.
 - Allowances for academic qualifications of officers and individuals.
 - Bonus for outstanding performance.
 - Appointment bonus of one month's salary paid to all new state employees.
 - Travel allowance for those assigned for a continuous period(s) exceeding 90 days.
 - Computer allowance.
 - Retirement bonus.
 - Student maintenance allowance for study abroad.
5. The maximum allowance payable to employees in return for overtime to be set at 25% of the original salary and 50% during official holidays and celebrations.
 6. Secondment days for employees shall not exceed 30 days within the same fiscal year.
 7. Monthly transportation allowances shall not include holidays.
 8. Payments of state employee salaries shall cease to be according to the Islamic calendar and shall be according to the astronomical calendar.

Economic analysts estimated that government employee salaries account for 50% of the Saudi budget and that allowances make up 30% of a Saudi employee's income. Saudi revenues have fallen by 50% since 2014 due to the decrease in oil prices, with the KSA being the largest exporter of oil in the world. As a result, the Kingdom recorded a budget deficit of 98 billion dollars in 2014 (Aljazeera.net, 2016).

2.6.3 Hashtags on Economic Issues

The period 2015-16 deeply affected Saudis and had profound implications on their livelihoods. The Royal Decrees issued in this period can be seen as attempts by the Saudi government to rectify some of the economic problems generated by the crisis. As we have seen, the first Royal Decree (2015) addressed in the current study relates to the 'White Lands' tax that was proposed as a solution to the housing shortage; and the second (2016) relates to the economic reforms announced by the Crown Prince of the KSA, Mohammed bin Salman in *Vision 2030*. Both of these issues arguably affected all Saudi citizens and had implications for their standard of living. Thus, ordinary citizens were eager for information about these issues beyond that provided in publicly sanctioned announcements. This thirst for information and an opportunity to ask questions about these issues and debate them was reflected in the Twitter trends in the KSA, the details of which are described below.

2.6.3.1 #White_lands_tax_officially_imposed: The Context

King Salman announced a key policy shift that involved imposing annual fees on land situated within designated urban growth boundaries amounting to 2.5% of their market value in order to solve a long-standing housing problem in the KSA. It covers all land used for housing or commercial housing purposes within urban growth boundaries which are owned by one or more persons with non-governmental natural or legal status. Regulations determine the criteria for land value estimation, the timetable for fee instalments, and processes to ensure fees are applied fairly and payment evasion is avoided. All fees and fines are deposited in a special account at the Saudi Arab Monetary Agency. The money raised is to be spent on housing projects, public facilities and provision of public

services to these projects. The Ministry of Housing drafted the regulations which were ratified by the cabinet after announcement in the official bulletin.

The Decree concerning the imposition of White Lands' Taxes was issued on 23 November, 2015 by Royal Decree No. M/4, following Cabinet Decision No. 48. This issue became a matter of Saudi PI trending on social websites after the hashtag #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed began to circulate following this official decision.

1- مراحل تطبيق الرسوم على الأراضي البيضاء داخل النطاق العمراني للمدن والمحافظات
 المرحلة الأولى: الأراضي غير المطورة بمساحة عشرة آلاف متر مربع فلكثر، والواقعة ضمن النطاق الذي تحدده الوزارة.
 المرحلة الثانية: الأراضي المطورة للعقود لمالك واحد في مخطط معتمد واحد، ما دام مجموع مساحتها يزيد على عشرة آلاف متر مربع.
 المرحلة الثالثة: الأراضي المطورة للعقود لمالك واحد في مخطط معتمد واحد، ما دام مجموع مساحتها يزيد على خمسة آلاف متر مربع.
 المرحلة الرابعة: الأراضي المطورة للعقود لمالك واحد في مدينة واحدة، ما دام مجموع مساحتها يزيد على عشرة آلاف متر مربع.

2- إذا لم تنطبق مرحلة معينة على أي من المدن، أو لم تنف الأراضى ضمن مرحلة معينة لتحقيق التوازن المطلوب بين العرض و الطلب، فيجوز سبقرار من الوزير- تجاوز تلك المرحلة والانتقال إلى المرحلة التالية

مراحل تطبيق رسوم الأراضي البيضاء

التسلسل	التاريخ	الأيام/الشهر	عدد الفوائز	عدد الأراضي	المساحة (مليون متر مربع)	المدينة	إيضاح
1	21-Mar-15						توسية مجلس الشؤون الاقتصادية والتنمية بإقرار الرسوم على الأراضي البيضاء
2	23-Nov-15	8.2 / 247					أقر مجلس الوزراء نظام الأراضي البيضاء لرسم سنوي 2.5% من قيمة الأرض
3	14-Jun-16	6.8 / 204					أقر مجلس الوزراء اللائحة التنفيذية للنظام، التي منحت وزير الإسكان صلاحية تجاوز بعض المراحل والانتقال إلى أخرى
4	7-Nov-16	4.9 / 146					بدء تسجيل الأراضي الخاضعة للرسوم في الرياض وجدة وحاضرة الدمام
5	13-Dec-16	1.2 / 36			635.00		انتهاء تسجيل الأراضي الخاضعة للرسوم، وبلغ عدد طلبات التسجيل 2278 طلب، بمساحة إجمالية 635 مليون متر مربع
6	29-Mar-17	3.5 / 106	300	245	100.00	الرياض	إصدار 300 فائز لـ 245 أرض في الرياض، بمساحة 100 مليون متر مربع
7	19-Apr-17	0.7 / 21	490	374	120.00	جدة	إصدار 490 فائز لـ 374 أرض في جدة، بمساحة 120 مليون متر مربع
8	16-May-17	0.9 / 27	503	336	105.00	حاضرة الدمام	إصدار 503 فائز لـ 336 أرض بحاضرة الدمام، بمساحة 105 مليون متر مربع
9	30-Jul-17			98	15.00	مكة المكرمة	تسجيل 98 قطعة أرض في مكة المكرمة، بمساحة 15 مليون متر مربع، ولم يصدر عدد الفوائز وعدد الأراضي
			1293	1,053	340.00		
10	29-Aug-17	1.0 / 30	87	63	7.87		أصدرت وزارة الإسكان 87 أمر سداد على من لم يلتزم بالتسجيل في الوقت المحدد لـ 63 أرضاً بمساحة 7.87 مليون متر مربع
11	2-Nov-17	2.2 / 65	15	13	3.99		أصدرت وزارة الإسكان الدفعة الثانية للمتأخرين بالتسجيل أراضيهم بـ 15 أمر سداد رسوم، شملت 13 أرضاً في الرياض وجدة والدمام، بمساحة 3.99 مليون متر مربع
12	26-Nov-17	0.8 / 24		64,620	1,292	مساحة تقديرية	تصنيف وزارة العدل لـ 64620 أرض كأراضي بيضاء، وتزويدها لوزارة الإسكان ببيانات الأراضي المطبق عليها مواسفات الأراضي البيضاء
				61.4	2,585		مضايف تصنيف وزارة العدل إلى تنفيذ وزارة الإسكان
					7.60		

Figure 0.15: Overview of stages of implementation of White Lands' Tax across the KSA (Omari, 2017)

Stages of Implementation of White Lands' Tax within the Urban Areas in Cities and Governorates

Stage 1: Undeveloped land with a minimum area of 10,000 m² within the regions specified by the Ministry

Stage 2: Developed land with single owner having authorized plan, with total area exceeding 10,000 m².

Stage 3: Developed land with single owner having authorized plan, with total area exceeding 5,000 m².

Stage 4: Developed land with single owner within a single city, with area exceeding 10,000 m².

1. **Should any stage fail to apply in any of the cities, or is there are insufficient plots of lands within a certain stage to achieve the required balance between supply and demand- a ministerial decision may prompt progression to the next stage. Timeline of Implementation of White Lands' Tax**

No.	Date	Days/ Months	Receipt total	Plot total	Area (million m ²)	City	Details
1	21/03/15						Economic and Developmental Affairs Council recommend authorization of White Lands' Tax.
2	23/11/15	8.2/247					Cabinet approved White Lands system, imposing annual tax of 2.5% of land value.
3	14/06/16	6.8/204					Cabinet approved executive regulations, allowing Minister of Housing to omit some stages and progress onto the next ones.
4	7/11/16	9.4/146					Registration of lands subject to tax in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam City starts.
5	13/12/16	1.2/36		63500			Registration of lands subject to tax ends. Some 2278 registration applications made for plots of land totalling 635 million m ² .
6	29/03/17	3.5/106	300	245	100.00	Riyadh	300 invoices issued for 245 plots of land in Riyadh totalling 100 million m ² .
7	19/04/17	0.7/21	490	374	120.00	Jeddah	490 invoices issued for 374 plots of land in Jeddah totalling 120 million m ² .
8	16/05/17	0.9/27	503	336	105.00	Dammam	503 invoices issued for 336 plots of land in Dammam City totalling 105 million m ² .
9	30/07/17		1293	98 1053	15.00 340.00	Mecca	Registration of 98 plots of land in Mecca totalling 15 million m ² . The number of invoices and plots of lands were unissued.
10	29/08/17	1.0/30	87	63	7.87		Ministry of Housing issued 87 invoices to those who failed to register by deadline. This included 63 plots of land totalling 7.87 million m ² .
11	2/11/17	2.2/65	15	13	3.99		Ministry of Housing issued second tax invoices (15) to those who failed to register land by the deadline. This included 13 plots of land in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam totalling 3.99 million m ² .
12	26/11/17	0.8/24		64620	1.292 2.585	Estimate	Ministry of Justice classified 64,620 plots of land as white lands, providing the Ministry of Housing with data on the plots classified as white lands.
Ministry of Justice Categorization multiplied by Ministry of Housing Implementation				61.4	7.60		

Table 0.1: Researcher's own translation of White Lands' Tax decision in the KSA (Omari, 2017)

The graphs from Google trends analytics shown in Figure 0.16, Figure 0.17 and Figure 0.18 demonstrate that the topic of White Lands tax was considered to be of PI by Saudi citizens.

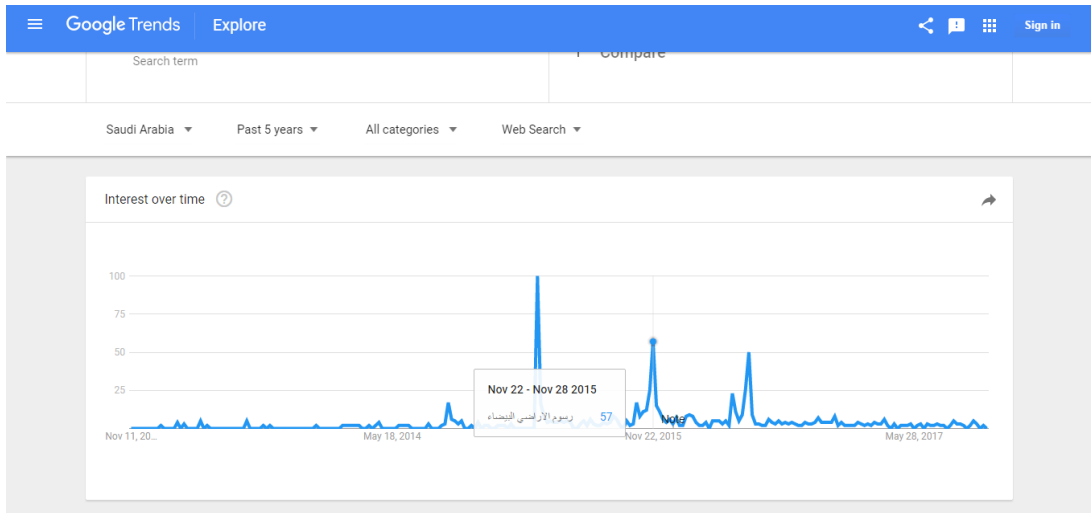


Figure 0.16: Google trends analytics for #White_Lands_Tax search in the KSA in 2015 showing a spike in the period November 22-28 2015

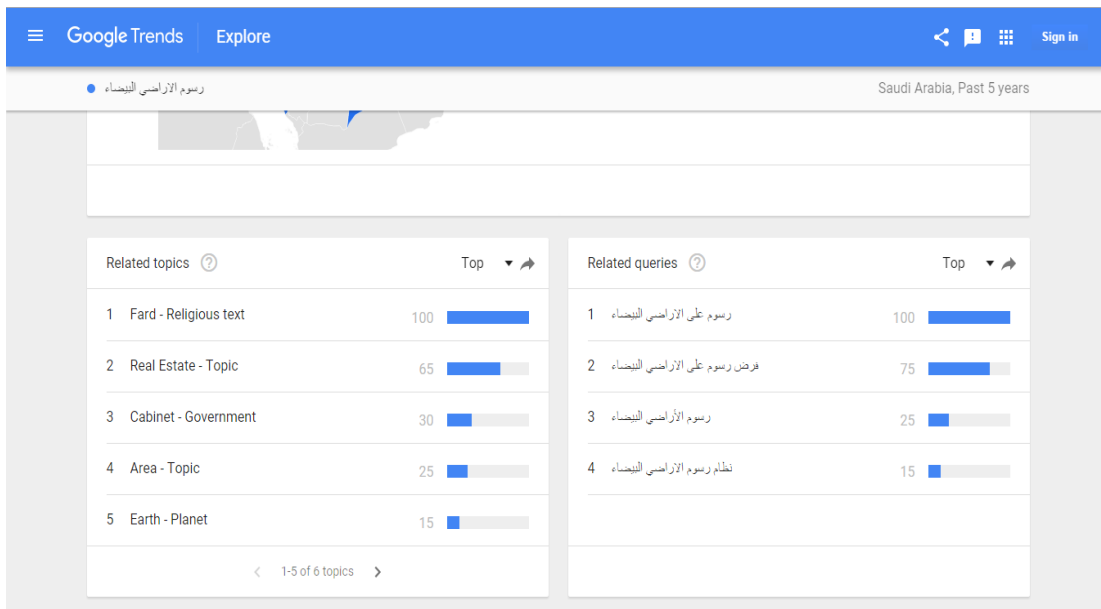


Figure 0.17: Google trends analytics for #White_Lands_Tax search in the KSA in 2015 by related topic

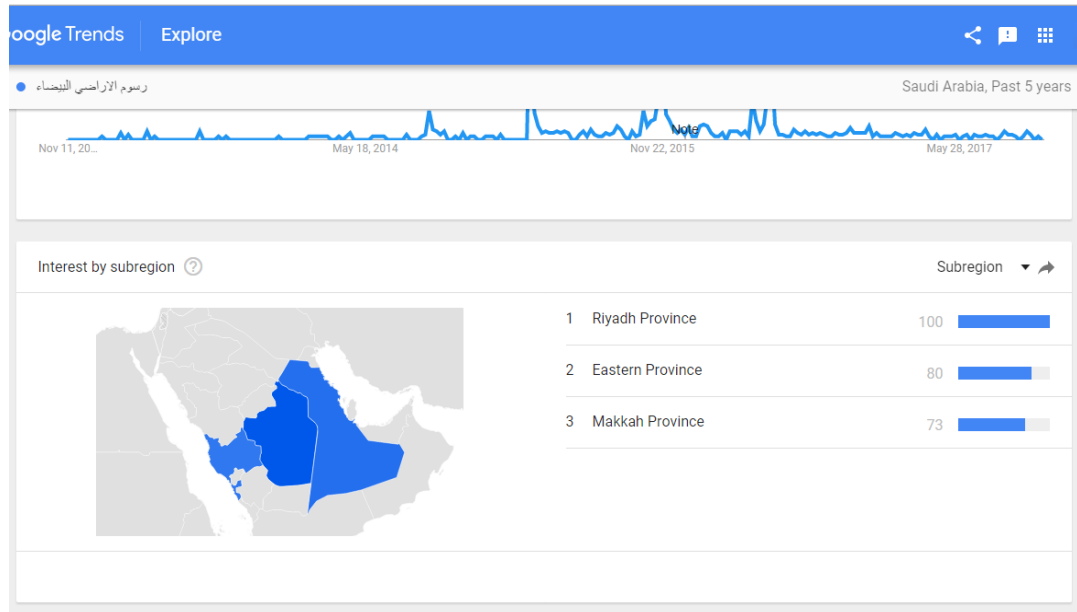


Figure 0.18: Google trends analytics for Saudi searching for #White_Lands_Tax in the KSA in 2015 by province

2.6.3.2 #Saudi_vision_2030: The Context

The KSA announced its *Vision 2030* strategy document focusing on the growth of the Kingdom's economy and freeing it from reliance on oil during a special interview with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman broadcast on the Al Arabiya satellite channel on April 25 2016. In this interview, he talked about this new vision for the KSA and future plans for the Saudi economy. The hashtag #Saudi_vision_2030 led global trends with more than 250,000 tweets.

The Crown Prince's interview mentioned #Saudi_vision_2030 and outlined the main plans for the Kingdom's economic and development goals for the next fifteen years. The hashtag received an unprecedented number of re-tweets, signifying the perceived importance of *Vision 2030* announced by Prince Salman both within and outside the KSA.

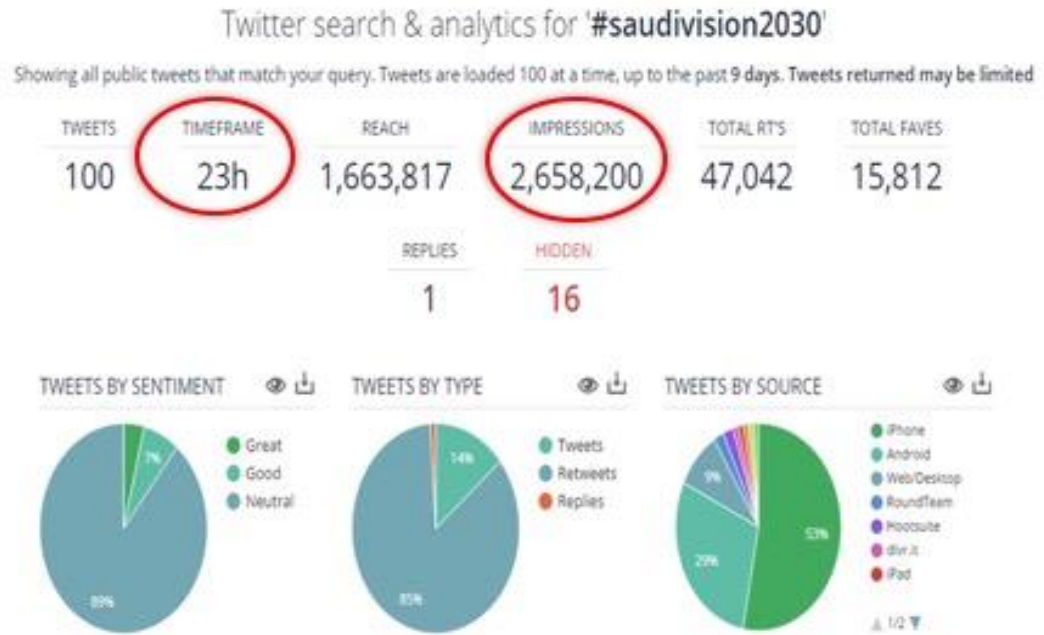


Figure 0.19 Statistics for online interactivity over a 23-hour period for #Saudi_Vision_2030 (Social Bearing, 2016)

The *Vision 2030* strategic document identifies seven key economic and development themes.

Theme One: A sovereign fund

The Kingdom will work on transforming the Saudi Public Investment Fund into a sovereign fund with assets estimated at 2 to 2.5 trillion dollars, making this the largest sovereign fund globally. The Crown Prince stated that primary data indicate that the fund would control more than 10% of global investment capacity and that the size of its properties would be estimated at more than 3% of global assets, adding that the KSA would become an investment power as a result of this fund which would be a main driving force for the whole world and not just the region.

Theme Two: Introducing Aramco to the stock market

The KSA will offer less than 5% of its massive state oil company Aramco for public subscription in the stock market. The revenues of this offer were to be allocated to provide funding for the Saudi Sovereign Fund. According to the Crown Prince Aramco forms one of the main pillars of the economic vision, adding that offering part of the company for subscription would yield a

number of benefits, mainly transparency. He noted that if Aramco were to be offered to the market, it would make its financial statements public and come under the scrutiny of the Saudi banking system, analysts and academics and even the World Bank. He also mentioned that he expected Aramco to be valued at more than 2 trillion dollars in total, meaning that even offering only 1% of Aramco for subscription would make this the largest offer in the history of the world. He also declared plans to transform Aramco into a holding company with an elected Board of Directors.

Theme Three: The Green Card project

The Crown Prince said that offering a Green Card scheme would enable Arabs and Muslims to live in the Kingdom for long periods of time, an announcement which received a large number of tweets. This scheme would also be a source of revenue for the KSA and was likely to be implemented within the next five years.

Theme Four: Founding the world's largest Islamic museum

The KSA has plans to increase the number of Muslim pilgrims coming each year from 8 million to 30 million by 2030. When he was asked how this would be achieved, Prince Mohammed responded that the necessary infrastructure developments are already underway including the building of the new Jeddah and Taif airports, development in Mecca and investments in land surrounding the Holy Mecca Mosque. The Crown Prince also announced that the KSA will build the largest Islamic museum in the world to be situated in Riyadh and that it would also be accessible to non-Muslim visitors.

Theme Five: Employment and the private sector

The *Vision 2030* plan aims to increase female participation in the work market from 22% to 30%, to lower unemployment rates among all Saudis from 11.6% to 7% and to raise the contribution made by the private sector to Saudi GDP from the current 3.8% to 5.7%.

Theme Six: Housing and projects

The Saudi government will work on restructuring the housing sector in order to increase the level of Saudi home ownership. The Crown Prince stressed

that infrastructure project spending will continue, but that *Vision 2030* will need significant government spending in this area. He spoke about the establishment of an office to manage government projects stating that its role will be to monitor all plans and objectives and to start to transform them into numbers and periodic performance measurements and to have oversight of harmonizing the work of government bodies, government plans and government programmes to ensure objectives are achieved.

Theme Seven: Countering corruption

The plan also makes calls to combat corruption. Prince Mohammed stated that: “Corruption is present in all societies and governments at varying levels. What matters to us today is to be among the forefront of countries that counter corruption” (Alhayat, 2016).

2.7 Conclusion

Social media (SM) have positively changed Saudis’ perception of their ability to determine their own media agenda. In their qualitative analysis of online activity in the Gulf States between 2009 and 2011, Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2013) noted an absence in the KSA of the constraints that tend to characterize public discussions of government and civil affairs in other countries in the region, even though the KSA is not a democratic state. The Literature Review (Chapter 3) will indicate that one of the challenges facing Saudi media is the level of freedom of expression. This is affected by factors such as State control, the power of religious leaders, advertising revenue, and Saudi cultural traditions, some of which has been briefly considered in this chapter, as has the development of Saudi media regulation and its impact on Saudi journalistic practices. This chapter has also focused on how digital technology and social media, in particular Twitter, has helped to create a platform from which CJ could emerge and this has set the stage for further exploration of the ways in which this relates to PI in the Saudi context.

Chapter Three: Literature Review on Citizen Journalism (CJ) and the Public Interest (PI) in Media

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will present an overview of the rise of CJ, grounded as it is in Internet technology and the rise of SM. The number of citizen journalists continues to grow globally at an exponential rate due to the increasing dominance of digital technologies associated with the Internet, particularly Smartphones, as well as SM, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Other tools that have proven significant in CJ include authentication protocols to restrict the number of people permitted to submit or edit content, together with Rich Site Summary (RSS) tools that enable the dissemination of content.

This chapter will begin by examining this nexus of technology and journalism and explain how a new type of journalism—CJ—has emerged from this confluence of factors. The principal focus will be on exploring the nature of CJ and to tracing its relationship with more traditional forms of mainstream media. This chapter will then shift its focus from the global to the local, by investigating specifically how CJ as a phenomenon has manifested itself in the KSA. Examples will be provided of this form of journalism in the KSA.

3.2 CJ in Democratic Countries

3.2.1 The History of CJ

The late 1980s saw the rise of a movement in journalism that called for media to uphold democracy as well as providing information and in 1988 a local newspaper, *The Ledger Enquirer*, based in Columbus, Ohio, became the first to use what was then referred to as public journalism (Kim and Lowrey, 2015).

The notion and practice of what is now known as CJ is in fact also far from a completely new phenomenon, as Jurrat (2011) points out. Journalism i.e. reporting, writing, and publishing by the ‘average’ concerned citizen (a non-professional journalist) can be traced all the way back to the invention of

the printing press and has been around as long as journalism itself.²² However, she notes that there are two key differences between CJ as we know it presently and how this was originally practised: "information could only be shared with a limited number of people, and only after a lengthy, and often costly, production process" (*ibid.*, p. 6).

According to Allan and Thorsen (2009), the importance of CJ first came to the fore in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. Many people looked to the Internet for eyewitness reports on what was going on at the site of the attacks. This trend was later adopted by mainstream media, which also started to search for information from eyewitness reports. The term 'citizen journalism' gained mainstream prominence during the 2004 tsunami disaster in Asia, when tourists who had been caught up in the natural disaster and humanitarian staff engaged in relief efforts shared videos and photographs via their blogs. By the time of the 2005 London Bombings, mainstream media had realised that CJ was an important facet of media, as those caught up in the attack shared their images and personal accounts with the mass media (Allan and Thorsen, 2009). According to Jurrat (2011), the spread of CJ in the 21st century has been boosted by the fact that it can highlight issues on a global platform or reveal issues that the government or those in power would prefer to conceal.

Dare defines CJ as "the kind of journalism in which the users or audience create content online rather than wait to be fed by the traditional media outlets" (2011, p.15). This is perhaps the simplest definition, but he adds a further observation by Carpenter that this type of journalism is "meant to benefit a community" (*ibid.*). The latter qualification is important, since it takes both the medium (the Internet) and the audience into account. This is crucial, since the initial expansive definition could also be used to include Internet publication of such things as videos of cats, poetry, or even home-made pornography, since all of these could be said to constitute online content. Clearly, the activity of CJ is more specialized and both of these criteria must be taken together to provide a concise understanding of the

²² Citizen journalists have variously been referred to as 'civic', 'street', 'democratic', 'participatory' and 'public' journalists.

phenomenon in question. A definition of CJ also includes the idea that it happens “when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another” (Rosen, 2008 cited in Deuze, 2009, p. 256). In addition, this collecting, reporting and analysis of information by citizens is intended to provide an account that is accurate as well as independent (Bowman and Willis, 2003).

A further distinction can be made between different sub-groupings of CJ, such as accidental, advocacy, and grassroots. The first of these is typified by an average person who finds him- or herself in the middle of a news event, and then documents this event by whatever means (text, photographs, or video); advocacy is more vocal and has an obvious specific bias, while grassroots emerges at the local level (Dare, 2011).

One way in which CJ sharply contrasts with traditional media journalism is that in much CJ, particularly of the grassroots type, no professional editor is in charge of the content (Jurrat, 2011, p.7). This aspect of CJ merits closer attention in order to consider all its consequences. Traditional media present themselves as the trusted guardian and transmitter of verifiable hard news. *The New York Times*, for instance, codifies this in its slogan "All the News That's Fit to Print". This statement is also emblematic of the attitude of the traditional mainstream media, in that it also implies that there is some news out there that is not fit to print. There are, of course, some very good reasons why editors of mainstream outlets and their lawyers would regard certain stories as not fit to print: they could be outright lies; or contain libellous material or contain errors and distortions. They might even contain deliberate misrepresentations intended to create a misconception.

As noted previously, Jurrat (2011) states that the idea of CJ originated with the invention of the printing press, when non-professional journalists shared information and brought to light various injustices that were prevalent in society. However, since the tools for producing and disseminating news content were restricted, this prevented CJ from becoming a widespread phenomenon. Brochures and pamphlets, which were historically the commonest form of dissemination, were expensive to produce and often involved a lengthy production process (Jurrat, 2011). In the contemporary era,

the Internet has increased the speed of disseminating content to target audiences, while simultaneously reducing the costs of doing this. As a result, not only can anyone become a citizen journalist, but CJ itself has become a core part of what journalism is today—a transformation that has taken barely more than 20 years, with the majority of the most significant changes taking place in the last decade.

CJ does not rely on trained professionals to keep an eye out for problematic material; instead, the power of the crowd is harnessed for the policing of content that violates certain policies or standards. This is the typical form of correction that has superseded the role of the traditional editor in contexts such as Wikipedia, YouTube, *The Huffington Post*, or the comments section of most online news portals (Jurrat, 2011, p.7). Moreover, institutional citizen media platforms, such as CNN's iReport, add an additional layer of verification, by simply affixing the official CNN label to reports that have been vetted and deemed worthy by the CNN editors themselves (*ibid.*). Research suggests that many younger people have begun to see the editorial role in traditional media as unnecessary, since they view new media information as being just as reliable as news from established sources (Netzley and Hemmer, 2012, p.49).

The fact that citizen journalists are untrained in journalistic methods can mean they are at greater risk of using unreliable sources and publishing incorrect or non-factual news. Research conducted by *Social Media Today* found that almost half of online users (49.1%) have been tricked by false 'breaking news' (Harper, 2014). Harper (2014) observes that this leads many to believe that CJ should not be used as a primary news source, as it lacks credibility and reliability and, like all media coverage, it should be approached with a degree of scepticism and caution. However, citizen journalists in the KSA who cover issues such as the economic ones addressed by this study are often experts in their field with journalistic experience (see 0 for profile of interviewees).

3.2.2 CJ and Democracy

Grimes (1999) saw the function of civic journalism in the US as being to improve both public life and American journalism through effective citizen

participation in public discussion, including those using new media. This form of civic journalism calls for active citizen participation in community life and provides the information individuals require to do this. Citizen journalists are thus made morally responsible for both themselves and their communities. This type of journalism has three key features: first, citizen journalists do not address readers as mere spectators or victims, but see them as potential participants in public affairs; second, they do not merely inform about issues but also show citizens how to act on these; and finally, they facilitate more effective public discussions. In order for this to work there must be public confidence in journalism (Rosen, 1991, p.22).

CJ could be expected to thrive in democratic countries, since well-functioning democracy should support and encourage people to contribute to the decision-making process (Pateman, 1970, pp.1-15). Social media platforms now afford ordinary citizens the opportunity to participate in journalism as the 'fourth estate,' ensuring that their voices are heard. Therefore, Internet CJ in itself could be classed as democratic in that a media platform can be used by everyone, irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity and class, which are some of the more usual foci of discrimination.

As Held (2006) notes, democracy functions to enable citizens to participate in government through elections and to have a measure of freedom and self-determination, so that political issues are seen as the province of citizens and their participation in debating them is held to be important. Accordingly, individuals require information provided by journalists to be able to make these decisions. In order for this to happen effectively, journalists have to provide information that is both accurate and comprehensive. They must also be able to investigate government and other powerful elites and to provide a means by which citizens can gain a good understanding of the world. Finally, journalism is expected to act as a public forum, obtaining and reflecting a variety of opinions from all sections of society. Clearly, however, for a range of reasons, this is not necessarily what happens in journalism in democratic states (Schudson, 2008).

Rees (2016) article offers a brief history of investigative journalism. US President Theodor Roosevelt (1858-1919) popularised the term "muckraker"

to refer to exposing corruption, one of the functions of journalism in American society at a time when media outlets were just emerging. As well as covering news, some journalists also drew attention to issues of injustice and exploitation, often with courage and ingenuity. For example, the American novelist and journalist, Upton Sinclair, penned a novel *The Jungle* about working conditions in Chicago's meat packing factories. Ida Tarbell, another American journalist, published a series of articles exposing the monopolistic actions of John Rockefeller Standard Oil Company that eventually led to the dismantling of Rockefeller's oil empire.

The post-World War Two era saw the emergence of public relations companies and governments began to learn how to deal with journalism. There was continuous rivalry between investigative journalists and influential groups which tried to manage which information reached the public. New technology also brought rapid changes to media outlets. The 'sixties saw the development of small, portable cameras that allowed filmmakers to carry the realities of the Vietnam war back to American homes. The US administration learned that it needed to include the media in its military operations and during the Gulf War of 1991 adopted a policy of "embedded journalism" intended to regulate reports sent from the battleground (Rees, 2016).

As CJ operates outside traditional media institutions, the ideas that it conveys and the stories that it relates may be unlike those in mainstream media and can provide a different source of legitimacy; as noted above, unlike professional journalists, citizen journalists do not require approval of an editor or head of a media organisation before publishing (Radsch and Karlekar, 2012; Bowman and Willis, 2003).

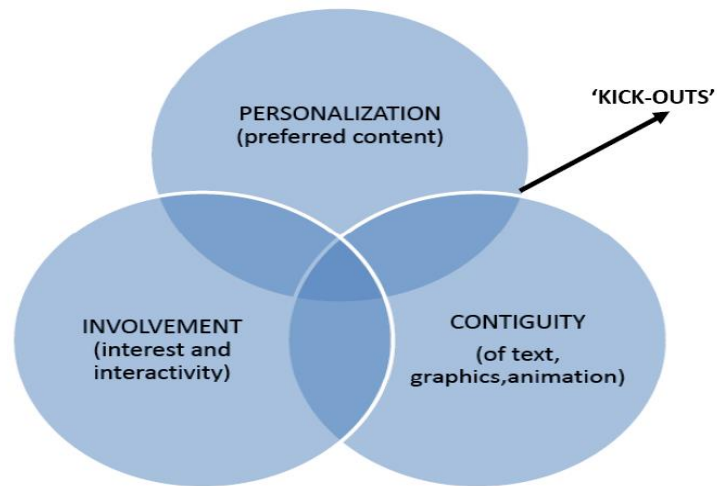


Figure 0.1: The PICK Model for multimedia news (Yaros, 2009)

Figure 0.1 demonstrates the process by which citizen journalists write reports, according to the model devised by Yaros (2009). Citizen journalists personalise their reports to elicit a positive response from readers, with individual expertise representing an important factor in determining the level of personalisation. They also aim to achieve involvement by fostering reader interest and interactivity. To help make the report memorable and understandable for readers, they make use of contiguous devices such as graphics, hypertext and moving images.

3.3 Critical Approaches to Citizen Journalism

The power of digital technology extends worldwide through a global structure in which all users, who may be traditional correspondents, social media users, bloggers, or vloggers, are all potentially interconnected; this interconnectivity enables users to follow so called 'nodes' of connectivity when checking information (Baran, 2012). Former journalist Andy Carvin leveraged these social media inter-connections to source information for a report on the Arab Spring. He accomplished this by asking his many Twitter followers to validate the information he gathered; he was also able to verify accounts associated with traditional news platforms, work with influential bloggers, and obtain information from non-government organisations who were involved (Hermida et al., 2012). Carvin's activities demonstrate that citizen journalists

are not simply utilising social media to obtain news, but also to promote and divulge the obtained information.

A journalism scholar (Whitaker) told the London School of Economics (LSE) that social media was of central importance in how the Arab Spring was reported and that it was a key tool to understand its impact from the point of view of Tunisia and other Arab states. Due to information passing quickly from one place to another during the course of a news event that develops rapidly, the situation has become rather complicated. For example, the new type of journalism adopted by Carvin easily acquires information from an array of social media platforms (e.g. YouTube and Facebook), which is a fast means of crowd-sourcing; however, acquiring information in this way may well exaggerate or misrepresent any information provided and received, potentially resulting in a distorted view of Arab nations (Hermida et al., 2012). According to Khondker (2011), several Arab online writes show little to no restraint, and indeed several citizen journalists tend to either disrupt ethical standards, or exaggerate stories in the absence of correct gatekeeping. Jackson (2019) also indicates that there is confusion regarding who should be referred to as a journalist, owing to the fact that anyone can publish news content. Furthermore, citizen journalists do not adhere to the standards of quality upheld by traditional news quality, probably because they have little understanding of the concept of what constitutes worthy news (Liu, 2010). Because there is a high degree of plagiarism in the contents of citizen journalism (Nabi & Oliver, 2009), and because citizen journalists are not as structured and pragmatic as traditional media, their work is seen as less credible. There have also been numerous cases whereby citizen journalists were found to have uploaded unethical or highly biased materials and stories. Citizen journalists have also been known to exaggerate their reports, due to malicious intent or to ignorance, in a manner which, as Johnston (2015) claims, transgresses professional and ethical standards.

Cammaerts (2008), who believes there is a 'dark side' to the naïve view of CJ as a tool for equality and the democratization of communication, highlights five problematic aspects of CJ. Of these, three are structural (colonization by the market; censorship by states, organizations, and industries; and appropriation by political and cultural elites) and two occur at

the individual level: social control enforced by citizens, or social control enforced by antidemocratic voices. Some of these problems are especially pertinent to this thesis and have been discussed in the interpretation of the empirical evidence gathered in this research. Regarding state censorship, Cammaerts (2008) notes that Saudi Arabia is amongst those non-democratic countries whose government monitors the contents that are shared online that are thought to be a threat to the status quo. This thesis explores the various incarnations of the Printed Materials and Publications Law (PMPL) and its application to the internet, as well as the case of the imprisonment of Saudi blogger Fouad AlFarhan and the case of Ola Al-Fares (see Sections 3.8.3 and 2.5.1). Furthermore, this thesis explores how powerful Saudi elites, such as the religious leadership, have exerted their influence on Twitter (see Section 2.5.1.2). The study also explores how becoming popular figures on Twitter has affected the status of these leaders.

Regarding the problem of content of a bullying, insulting, or anti-democratic nature, the people interviewed in this study seemed to be concerned mainly, rather, with the prevention of the spread of fake news and rumour-mongering on Twitter (see Section 5.4.8). This was in the context of hashtags that dealt with economic issues, where accuracy of information was seen as essential. Cammaerts (2008) notes that although new technologies usually claim to be a force for democratization, this is not necessarily always the case. This thesis has revealed how Saudi Twitter has served the public interest by allowing public debates to take place and by enabling an exchange of information about crucial economic issues that affected the livelihoods of Saudi citizens. Indeed, Cammaerts (2008) notes that SM does make resistance possible. He also suggests that SM exists in a 'twilight zone' between public and private matters, and that, consequently, citizen journalists are vulnerable against repressive states and online abuse, and that one strategy for avoiding this is self-censorship (ibid). This study has considered self-censorship (see Section 7.5) in the light of the religious and social taboos of Saudi society and an awareness of the legal restrictions on what can be published.

Although Temple (2013) concentrates on CJ in the West, he addresses the global issue of whether CJ empowers citizens, and concludes that

although it still has some way to go before this empowerment is fully achieved, it does have the potential to achieve it, and at the very least that the increase in audience participation has led to a better understanding of journalism and to higher levels of media literacy. He subscribes to the definition of journalism given by McNair (1998) and identifies three key elements that define it: truth, newness, and authorship. Temple notes that CJ is hardly new or restricted to online media, as there are plenty of instances from the past when ‘ordinary citizens’ published commentaries or accounts of events in the form of pamphlets and journals. Such CJ also has a long history of being eradicated by powerful elites, who either prosecuted this type of journalism or supplanted it with less radical mainstream media. For these reasons, Temple is sceptical about the fact that SM can provide a platform for the “return of radical, alternative and influential local journalism” in spite of the potential that digital platforms seem to have (2013, p.237). He also notes that traditional media are ‘colonising’ digital platforms used by citizen journalists and that some governments take action to limit radical sites and content (ibid p.239). There is also concern about the quality of CJ, with “professional journalists regarding user participation with suspicion and its filtering, editing and moderating as essential to preserve their traditional ethics and news values”. These issues were investigated in this research by interviewing columnists, public figures, and professional journalists (see Chapter 5). Given the importance of providing accurate information to the public about key issues such as the ones addressed in the selected hashtags, the interviewees expressed the concern that information in CJ should be credible, and many of them had useful suggestions on how this could be achieved. For example, the columnists and public figures interviewed were generally in favour of some non-governmental organisation which could monitor content and penalise citizen journalists who spread fake news. Interestingly, the professional journalists thought that citizen journalism should be under the aegis of the Saudi Journalism Association (see Section 5.4.5). The universally shared desire for CJ to be so closely monitored suggests that its potential to empower the citizens is perceived less than its risk to spread disinformation and be misused. Temple also expressed the concern that citizen journalists do not represent all strata of society and are often highly educated or trained in journalism (ibid). This

was indeed shown to be the case in this thesis, which looked at CJ produced on Twitter by economics experts. However, as Temple notes, the fact that audiences can interact with citizen journalists and create content themselves does constitute a form of empowerment and this is evidenced in the findings of this research.

Of particular interest were Twitter's interactive features, which allowed users to ask questions to citizen journalists who were posting on the hashtags in the sample. By using such interactive features, these citizen journalists were able to respond to questions and clarify the meaning of economic concepts; this process, arguably, led to an increase in the awareness of economics in general, and in particular of issues connected to the economic crisis in the KSA (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1.5, and Chapter 6, Section 6.4.1).

3.3.1 Populism in Citizen Journalism

Populist citizen journalism is a phenomenon through which the logic of populist media may be analysed. It ensues when media institutions tolerate populist messages from their audiences, often in the form of comments on their media channels (Barr, 2009). Aalberg et al. (2016) believe this tolerance to be hypocritical, as, while media organisations and institutions commonly ban instances of populism at the editorial level, they enable its dissemination, and the dissemination of racist conversations within their blogosphere, possibly to increase their channel's viewership and the profits from associated online adverts.

The network media logic suggests that the connection between populist leaders in citizen journalism and their followers operates void of intermediaries. Hence, the new content is free from filtration by journalists or gatekeepers (Barr, 2009). The online media environment is conducive to the rotation of traditional opinion leaders, thereby facilitating the public's perception of citizen journalism as a one-step movement of communication (Ernst & Young, 2016). Similarly, the horizontal yet pervasive nature of citizen journalism facilitates a wide circulation of populist material with potentially significant impacts. This form of viral diffusion, even with various restrictions in

the echo-chamber environment in which political opinions are substantiated and amplified, creates a community which shares the same belief system, which is later used to determine consecutive media content (Barr, 2009).

Although the income obtained from the KSA's land tax is earmarked for development projects, some Saudi citizen journalists have dismissed it as a way of controlling market forces and collecting revenue (Ernst and Young, 2016; Parasie, 2015). Many other citizen journalists consider it to be of benefit to urban development because of the rise in regulations about using land efficiently and planning sustainably. However, research suggests that this would necessitate investment by shareholders in other sectors (Wenner, 2016). Populist citizen journalists writing about the white lands tax omitted mentioning other significant market inefficiencies, such as share prices fluctuating dramatically in response to announcements in the media. As a result, citizens were led to believe that the white land tax would only benefit the development and real estate organizations, since the KSA was likely to experience a major rise in demand for development very shortly. Such one-sided news prompted many landowners to sell their land to developers soon after the land tax was enacted, in order to avoid having to pay the tax (Arab News, 2016). Bullock (2010) believes that populism plays an important role in Arab politics, even though the Saudi traditional press regards populist citizen journalism as unsophisticated and reliant on the emotional and didactic tone of Arab politics; the only references made to populism are to use it as an insult against opposing political parties and aimed at undermining their future plans (Barr, 2009).

3.3.2 Scholarship on Techno-Sceptic Viewpoints

Johnston (2015) states that many researchers suggest that citizen journalists are likely to face unique challenges when using social media or blogs, as it is difficult to verify any useful social media post without involving experts; this may increase the probability that false information is published. This problem notwithstanding, many organisations exist in the Arab world that can support best practices by offering advice and professional coaching. An example of such an organisation is the Aswat digital platform, which citizen

journalists in the Middle East can access and which provides analyses, verified dialogues, and informed opinions about current events; in this sense, Arab nations have made progress in making their citizen journalists better trained and more responsive to the need of their audiences for transparency on social media (Naaeke et al., 2011).

Digital information can be easily manipulated, and this poses another significant challenge. Jackson (2019) suggests that there are currently authoritarian governments and secret services that intentionally spread false information. Furthermore, research by Nabi (2009) and Naeke (2011) highlights how the international media focus on violent events in Muslim and Arab nations, much to the annoyance of many Arab bloggers (in particular those in the KSA), who object to how Muslims and Arabs have become targeted internationally and how this has sometimes resulted in economic boycotts (Hermida et al., 2012). This indicates that although citizen journalism facilitates user interaction, it has sometimes resulted in serious problems, as any news reporting, regardless of where it comes from or who published it, has the potential to significantly influence social and political perspectives (Khondker, 2011; McCombs & Reynolds, 2009).

Wolfsfeld et al (2013) reviewed studies that explored the role of SM in the Arab Spring, and concluded that SM took a different role in each of the countries involved. They also observed that SM played a different role in each country not so much in the sense of what technology was used, but in the sense of how that technology was used (Anderson, 2011). In the Gulf States, like the KSA for example, although there was a lot of activity on SM, protest levels were low (Hussain & Howard, 2012). Conversely, the high levels of protest in Tunisia and Egypt came not as a result of their access to SM, but as a result of specific political grievances. It is important, then, to evaluate the role of SM in the light of a political understanding of the Arab Spring; SM is just a channel of communication and by itself it is not sufficient to explain unrest, the origin of which is rooted, rather, in hardship, corruption, and repression (Norris, 2012). Wolfsfeld et al (2012) suggest that a 'contextualist' approach - which emphasises how political, social, and economic factors affect the role of SM in collective action - must be used.

In this thesis, the hashtags selected were contextualized by explaining their economic and political context (i.e. the economic crisis in the KSA and the government's response to it) (see Chapter 6). Also of crucial importance was the lack of a platform for discussion in the traditional Saudi media, and the need for Saudi citizens to get information about the economic issues that were deeply affecting their lives. An example of this was given by interviewee PF1, who reported that when young users read CJ on Twitter and compared it to the information provided by the traditional media, they felt as though they were reading about "two different worlds" (see Section 7.2.2). Furthermore, several tweets with the hashtag *Saudi_Vision_2030* stated that Twitter was giving them all the information they required (see Section 6.8.2). This indicates that many Saudi citizens are turning to CJ on Twitter for information (see Section 7.2.2).

3.4 CJ in the Arab World

3.4.1 The Emergence of CJ

In the Arab world, CJ first came to prominence in 2003 in the aftermath of the US and UK offensive in Iraq against Saddam Hussein. Hamdy (2009) notes how this conflict prompted various bloggers to provide updates on the situation; the most prominent being *Salam Pax* (an Iraqi architect). These early efforts snowballed, as increasing numbers of individuals took to using blogs as platforms for delivering their opinions on various subjects hitherto considered taboo in Arab society, including sensitive political, social and economic issues such as human rights, police brutality and sexual harassment. Examples of citizen journalist blogs included *Sabah's Blog*, *The Arabist*, *Sandmonkey*, *Black Iris*, *Ghalia's Cocktail Blog* and *Baheyya*. These bloggers communicated mostly in English and typified the views of westernised liberals in the region. These citizen journalists used blogs to attract global attention to their cause, lobbying and communicating with like-minded activists. They also acted as alternative media, providing information that their counterparts in the traditional media did not, due to censorship.

However, as well as providing an alternative view to that of the traditional media, citizen journalists can also disseminate propaganda, especially during times of crisis. They can attract readers by using powerful visual material such as photographs and videos which can have more impact than text, with social networking sites such as Flickr allowing them to search for and store images or share them with others (Allan and Thorsen, 2009).

Improvements in the technology for writing in Arabic script further increased CJ in the region, as more individuals were able to start blogging in Arabic. Hamdy (2009) argues that this development was influential in widening the reach of citizen journalists to a domestic audience. Notable blogs that instigated a wave of blogging in Arabic include Kefaya, a movement for change that arose in Egypt after exposing police brutality there. Blogs also provided a platform for debate following the assassination of Lebanon's Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, in 2005. Hamdy (2009) observes that citizen journalists in the Arab world share something in common with their counterparts in developed countries, in that both fail to regard themselves as journalists and are therefore not bound by the ethical guidelines or press regulations that are applied to professional journalists. According to Hamdy (2009), SM platforms like Twitter provide citizen journalists with ways of discussing social problems and political issues such as the abuse of human rights, allowing them to attract international attention by these means. Ali (2012) notes, however, that in the Arab world, as in some Asian countries, citizen journalists have to deal with Internet censorship and religious taboos affecting their activities.

3.4.2 The Arab Spring

The change in political climate, popularly known as the Arab Spring, marked an important period in the development of CJ in the Arab region. One of the most prominent features of this series of popular uprisings was the extent to which coverage of these events was dominated by SM and online platforms (Siddiqui, 2014). Although political and social injustices that had become systemic and malignant within the region provided the context for the Arab Spring, online news coverage played a catalytic role in the widespread revolution with online platforms enabling participants to provide their own perspective on local events. CJ could be seen as plugging the gap between

the state and the traditional media institutions, on one hand, and citizens, on the other. This proved vitally important as this gap meant that historically citizens' participation in discussions of political, social and economic issues had been limited at best (Khasib, 2015)

In Egypt, for example, state media outlets simply disseminated propaganda for President Mubarak's regime, so during the Arab Spring citizens used SM like Twitter and Facebook for anti-government campaigning. In Syria, where citizens were publishing news on blogs or Facebook, a website entitled *Tahree Syria* launched its 'You are the editor' initiative aimed at young citizen journalists, allowing them to report events online (Khasib, 2015). When citizen journalists used SM to report the Assad regime's killing of members of the opposition, their reports were taken up by mainstream media. In addition, CNN's iReport was used by citizen journalists to report on the latest events in Syria and elsewhere (Leigh, 2013).

After analysing over 3 million tweets, gigabytes of streamed video content on YouTube, and thousands of blog posts generated during the Arab Spring, scholars concluded that SM played a central role in shaping political debates at that time, helping to raise expectations that the revolution would be politically successful (O'Donnell, 2011). Another report by the US Institute of Peace focused on the uprisings in Bahrain, Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, analysing Bit.ly links (short URLs used in SM like Twitter). It concluded that SM was the causal mechanism in the uprising as some had previously supposed (Associated Foreign Press, 2011). Numerous examples from the Arab Spring highlight how CJ and reportage are capable of generating a political agenda with the power to influence public opinion and thought.

The Arab Spring initiated the mobilization of news and updates using social platforms such as Twitter, and its immediate impact allowed information to spread quickly among citizens. To regulate this phenomenon and create a sense of credibility, the KSA initiated a process of authorization and licenses for journalists producing news or news updates whether in print or SM. Although the Arab Spring has been one of the biggest events in recent years in the region, relatively few studies have fully quantified the role that SM played in this event and what this might mean for agenda-setting initiatives in

CJ. This is especially of interest given the aftermath of the Arab Spring which has included events such as the humanitarian crisis in Syria that came in the wake of events after the revolt against Bashar Assad and the subsequent flight of thousands of refugees (Al-Rawi and Fahmy, 2018).

Arab regimes considered the new internet and satellite technologies that emerged in the early 1990s as a threat to their control of the media and initially attempted to block these (Amin, 2001). Later, when these technologies spread throughout most parts of the Arab world, these regimes made attempts—largely unsuccessful—to impose censorship on them. New media was much faster than traditional media and was not hampered by bureaucratic processes. Platforms such as Twitter meant that ordinary citizens could post information about events as they unfolded. These developments have had a major socio-political impact on the KSA, a country noted for its conservatism (Al-Jenabi, 2016).

3.4.3 User-Generated Content, Gate-watching, and Participatory Journalism

3.4.3.1 User-Generated Content

Recent studies have demonstrated that audiences have a growing impact on journalism, and this is changing the relationship that has traditionally existed between audiences, the media, and its correspondents. This transformation was enabled by the technological innovations that have created online platforms for users to generate and share content and engage in participatory journalism (social media, video blogs, and wikis) (Stanoevska-Slabeva et al., 2012). As a result, over the last two decades journalism has changed significantly and the number of new information outlets, particularly those which are user generated ones, has increased so much that the role played by journalists in generating the news has been challenged by these new information channels and the increasing involvement of audiences (*ibid*).

Stanoevska-Slabeva et al (2012, p.29) pointed out that although news on SM can be created from the curation of individual pieces of information which users observe, select, and then put together, traditional journalistic skills are still needed “to glue the curated pieces of information to a story”, and they concluded that this form of curation is a type of ‘gate-watching’, rather than

'gate-keeping', and that the curators need to have the technical skills required to assess the strength and validity of a story.

3.4.3.2 Gatekeeping and Gatewatching

The traditional media, such as printed newspapers and TV programmes, have a limited and fixed amount of space (Moyo, 2009). Consequently, journalists have to select which news are worthy enough to be printed or broadcasted, a process referred to as "gatekeeping" (Newman et al., 2014). However, gatekeeping can occur not only at the input stage, when the journalist selects what news stories to write about, but also at the output stage, when editors select from these stories the ones that are to be printed or broadcast, and at the response stage, when the editor chooses which audience responses (if any) are to be included (*ibid*). Bruns (2011) believes that this last stage is not representative of a genuine conversation with the public, because the gatekeeping power is always in the hands of the editors. Bruns also believes that real participatory journalism has only recently emerged, mainly due to two factors: the increase in news channels through online publishing and collaborative models like SM, and the ability of users to connect directly with the people and organisations they are interested in and discuss issues with them and other users. This proliferation of channels and user commentary on news events leads to a practice referred to as 'gate-watching', whereby it is the users who keep track of the news. In other words, the users themselves who decide which are the most newsworthy issues by monitoring information that passes through their favourite "gates" (i.e. SM platforms) and identifying the information they feel is the most significant and relevant to them (Stanoevska-Slabeva et al., 2012). Stanoevska-Slabevska et al (2012, p.25) noted that Bruns's division of gatekeeping and gatewatching into three stages (input, output, and response) applies to CJ on SM, and that this social media 'curation' "...rests on the curators' awareness of what news topics might concern their audience". This is particularly significant when considering the role that CJ on SM plays in relation to public interest and how the public convey their concerns to citizen journalists. It is important, therefore, for the gate-watchers to be aware of what topics might be of interest to their

audience. As will be shown in Chapters 5 and 6, the interview data and the tweets collected for this thesis were analysed to evaluate the awareness of citizen journalists about the concerns of users regarding key economic issues in the KSA during that period.

These new 'gate-watchers' have established a new type of gate, one that is also used by the media and other users and in which everyone acts as witnesses for current events (Newman, 2009). This process assumes interesting connotations in non-democratic country; for example, Ali and Fahmy (2013) note that even though gatewatching is common in Western countries, in the Middle East, and especially in Saudi Arabia, this is much more difficult, because in these countries it is the authoritarian governments and other public relations institutions who act as gatekeepers. Almaghlooth (2013) states that in a country such as Saudi Arabia, where the State and the Royal family closely-monitor the press, gate-watching in the news is problematic.

In relation to the current study, citizen journalists who were experts in economics were able to add to the reports issued by government-controlled traditional media by responding to questions and comments by their followers on Twitter, thus arguably serving public interest more directly. Bruns (2011) suggests that:

“user-led, crowd-sourced practices of news coverage and news curation which employ gatewatching approaches have often been described, somewhat incorrectly, as ‘citizen journalism’, [which] appears to imply both that what participants practice here is comparable and equivalent to mainstream industrial journalism in its conventional forms, and that the professional journalists working in the industry are not also citizens” (2011, p.124).

In this study, however, there was indeed very strong evidence of a cross-over between citizen journalists and professional journalists; the latter, acting in a personal capacity, published on SM what they were unable to publish in traditional media outlets. Indeed, Bruns (2011) also suggests that there are now “more productive attempts to explore points of connection and

cooperation between ‘professional’ and ‘citizen’ journalists”, of which there is evidence in the current study.

Finally, in gate-watching the stories serve as enablers for public discourse. In this sense, the ‘response’ stage of the gatekeeping process assumes, in gate-watching, a central role (*ibid*). This research demonstrates that this has been especially important in the Saudi context, as CJ has responded to the public demand for information. Furthermore, this thesis argues that commentary on central economic issues has granted Saudi citizens a much greater ability to participate and respond than would have been possible via the traditional media.

3.4.3.3 Participatory Journalism and User-Generated Content

According to Rosenbaum (2011), in Arab countries user-generated content requires citizens to handle a lot of information from a range of sources, in order to locate, sort, verify, put together, and store useful information, and to create a more relevant resource (Rotman et al., 2011). In view of these activities, user-generated content is often compared to gatewatching, as it encourages public involvement and can be found when information obtained from social media platforms is compiled. However, Liu (2010) notes that there is a lack of research into this phenomenon, in spite of the growing appetite for user-generated content and the increase in opinion leaders in the KSA. Participatory journalism in the country is comprised mainly of blogs created by citizen journalists, many of which, like Arabist.net, often consist of breaking news, analyses, or detailed commentary. In contrast to more traditional kinds of user-generated content, these blogs provide support and the use of feedback-generating systems so that other audience members can add information in the form of Facebook updates or tweets (Almaghlooth, 2013). User-generated content is a way for young people to keep abreast of what is going on with their online communities, as well as the more radical roles played by social media in rallying support and feedback in the KSA during the 2011 Arab revolutions and protests (*ibid*).

3.5 Research on CJ in the Arab World

According to Wall (2015), the lack of research on CJ in developing countries can create a 'distorted' perception of what this entails. To date, relatively little research has been conducted on CJ in the context of the Arab world. Badawi (2015) conducted a comparative meta-analysis of academic research into new media, comprising academic studies published in the period 2000-2014 from 87 Arabic and 75 English academic journals from databases including Science Direct, Emerald Insight, Wiley, Sage Publications, All Academic, Springer Link, Ebesco host, Interscience and Proquest. Results showed that most Arabic research focused on Web 1.0 and 2.0; and on the role and impact of electronic news (see, for example, AlKhatab, 2007) rather than users producing news and following up local and international events. The few studies exploring Web 3.0 and 4.0 were limited to examining the social, economic, political and cultural effects associated with SM. Studies by Abdelmajid (2011), Almasery (2011), Sami (2011), Radwan (2012) and Bahaj (2013) all examined the effects of SM on youth while Abu Zayad (2010) and Alrafaie (2014) focused on the effects of SM on the educated elite and media professionals.

This study will analyse the content of hashtags and citizen journalistic practice on Twitter and will examine both Web 3.0 and 4.0. Examining Saudi CJ will provide insights into how CJ helps to create economic content in a time of crisis that raises awareness through direct engagement with Saudi citizens, and how this shapes Saudi PICJ.

Hamdy (2009) and Ali (2012) do not consider how Saudi journalism is regulated or practised, despite the importance of understanding the production process behind the news and how censorship is applied in the KSA. Moreover, Wall (2015) tackles many important aspects of CJ but never mentions the KSA or how the concept of CJ functions there. This research will draw on a concept discussed in Wall's (2015) article entitled "Technologies of the Self(ie): Social Media and the Individual Citizen Journalist" in order to explore how citizen journalists on Twitter have gained their influence in the KSA and how professional journalists use these individuals as sources. At times of crisis, there is a greater need to know what is happening, and more Saudis use Twitter to interact with citizen journalists.

In the context of the KSA this may explain the emergence of Saudi CJ, specifically because there have been significant changes in the structure of Saudi journalism as a result of the Saudi oil crisis. As noted previously, in non-democratic countries CJ bridges the gap between the state and its traditional media institutions, on one hand, and citizens, on the other, increasing citizen participations in discussing political, social and economic issues. CJ thus acts as a reform movement which draws citizens into playing a more active role in their communities, enabling them to take part in debates about events rather than being merely passive recipients of traditional media coverage (Khasib, 2015).

In December 2014, the financial crisis triggered by plummeting oil prices created a huge demand for media coverage of economic affairs to remedy Saudi citizens' lack of knowledge about their country's economic status. (Daiss, 2016) The public not only required information, but also analysis of the economic changes which had taken place. This created a demand for coverage by individuals with an economics background or access to appropriate sources who were able to explain the current Saudi economic situation, provide fact-based opinions and share their analyses on different social platforms to raise economic awareness among Saudi citizens. Evidence of the control that the Saudi government has over national media is reflected in the fact that Reuters received a scoop of an impending realignment of Saudi economic policies due to the drop in oil prices but the sources that provided this insider information to Reuters preferred to remain anonymous due to the political sensitivity of this economic issue (Reuters, 2015). Most of the reports analysing economic issues have been produced by foreign media outlets and international economic agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These news outlets have the advantage of operating without the fear of crackdowns or victimisation from the authorities, which allows them to report more objectively on the KSA's economic issues.

In Western countries, a number of CJ sites were created due to the belief that mainstream media are not prioritizing the news that the community requires or have been impacted due to cutbacks in local news, such as iBrattleboro.com (US), MyHeimat (Germany), and Crikey (Australia) (Bruns, Wilson, and Saunders, 2008). This type of CJ shares some features with

professional journalism, but aims to “recover a kind of journalism [...] they fear is being lost” (Ryfe and Mensing, 2010, p.36).

Amateur news bloggers were the first citizen journalists to use SM platforms. They typically employed a subjective style of narration that was different to that traditionally found in the media (Robinson, 2009). Although some of the content of these blogs was original, many simply offered personal interpretations of news coverage produced by professional journalists (Bruns and Highfield, 2012). Later, these bloggers started to post their CJ on Twitter as this was easier. In non-democratic countries like the KSA, however, citizen journalists must rely on platforms like Twitter that gives them the level of freedom they require to explain their views.

There has been an increase in the number of citizen journalists on Twitter as well as users who just post pictures and videos of an event they have witnessed as a one-off (Mortensen, 2011). Professional journalists and amateurs both contribute to social media in a way that is completely different to how journalism operates in traditional media and have together formed what Bruns and Highfield (2012, p.9) refer to as a “shared space of produsage”.

Some have argued that CJ posted on Twitter would lead to “the collaborative co-creation of news” (Hermida, 2013, p.298). However, according to Wall (2015), there is limited evidence of this creative blend of content from ordinary Twitter users and professional journalists. Instead, with the emergence of the so-called Twittersphere, SM posts by media professionals continue to represent the dominant sources of news narratives.

CJ is difficult to regulate, especially with the availability of platforms that enable individuals to report and provide information. The KSA and other Arab nations are unlikely to be supportive of such unregulated media and the authorities can impose controls on the ways such platforms are operated and the kind of information they can provide (see 0 on media regulation in the KSA). For example, social media users in the KSA alleged to have ‘shown sympathy’ towards Qatar during the recent political crisis (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1.4)were accused of cyber-crime, an offence which carries a penalty of five years’ imprisonment or a three million Riyal fine. Arab media

often lack objectivity because they are required to give the official view in the name of 'national interests', as is the case with Saudi media policy.

An additional issue is that of journalistic independence since media outlets often depend on advertising for a major source of income. Because of this, they are unwilling to run stories that might anger advertisers, meaning that they could be said to indirectly control certain media. For media to be independent of control by the State or other powerful organisations and for journalists to be able to write freely, the editorial board of the publication in question also has to be independent (Al Sabah, 2007). CJ is not subject to these economic pressures as they are neither beholden to advertisers, nor to an editorial board.

3.6 SM as a Platform for CJ in the KSA

Even before the advent of liberalized online-based media platforms, King Salman had acknowledged the important social function of the mainstream official media. Despite this recognition, the media was only allowed to operate in ways that were government-approved, since there were no independent official media; CJ takes on a role that challenges this status quo.

Sienkiewicz (2014) delineates two tiers of CJ, which work in unison to make significant steps in radical and systematic re-conceptualization of public spaces, and claims that CJ enhances the power of the media to inform its audience. The first tier of CJ that Sienkiewicz delineates consists of local reporters, who combine low-cost technology and the Internet to expose injustices within their own social groups. For example, a video of King Salman's high-ranking aide, Mohammed al-Tobayshi, slapping a photographer was posted online, resulting in the aide's dismissal (BBC, 2015). The second tier of CJ that Sienkiewicz delineates consists of mainstream platforms, such as national newspapers and television stations, among others (Sienkiewicz, 2014). While the first tier is able to gain social support "It is only when the second tier is involved that [CJ] gains sufficient impact, for example when *Gulf News* reported the incident with the aide" (Sienkiewicz, 2014, p.692).

SM have also become important tools for communication, commentary, and engagement on important political and social issues among Saudi citizens. *The Economist* (2015) notes that there are over 14 million people in the KSA who use the Internet and SM, and claims that the Internet and SM have had a greater impact in this country than in any other part of the world. Putting SM in the hands of so many citizens constitutes somewhat of a “social revolution”, since they now have the means to obtain information from sources other than mainstream media. However, online government censorship is still strong enough to mitigate this effect.

One of the reasons for the ubiquity of SM is that in the KSA 60% of the population is aged between 26 and 34, matching the age demographic of those who frequent SM platforms (*The Economist*, 2015). Many of these users choose to frequent these SM platforms anonymously, likely as a result of the repressive regime in the KSA. In many instances, users go on SM platforms to vent their frustrations and shed light on social and political injustices; the fact that several users write critically about establishment institutions such as the monarchy makes the Saudi virtual world a socially progressive environment.

Noman *et al.* (2015) showed that an estimated 32% of Saudis use Twitter, and that, just like in other nations, this high level of usage is possibly related to the fact that mobile Internet penetration in the KSA is estimated to be at 60% of the population. Politics, along with football and religion, are the subjects most tweeted about in the KSA, and Twitter provides a platform for the kind of dissent and criticism which are not allowed in traditional media, such as support for militancy in Iraq and Syria or criticism of the monarchy. Intense Twitter debates often revolve around conservative political and religious views.

It is increasingly common, in the KSA, to see criticism of institutions like the Saudi Royal Family or complaints by women about clerics who want to curtail their freedom. Members of the legal profession, such as judges and lawyers, also partake in this open criticism to government corruption or social neglect, a criticism which is mainly vented through Twitter (Worth, 2012, p.6).

The 2016 Freedom House Report noted that, as of 2015, nearly 70% of the Saudi population had fixed or mobile Internet access, and that access to

the Internet was being used by many Saudis as a channel to express their political opinions and expose government corruption. The report also noted that the citizens who used Twitter were close to 5 million, and that approximately 50% of these were ‘active’ (i.e. engaging in posting, re-tweeting, and creating content). Twitter is so popular in the Arab world that 88% of all the tweets posted on Twitter in March 2012 came from just five Arab countries (*The Economist*, 2015, p.103), with the KSA alone contributing 29% of them (*ibid.*). The use of Twitter exploded in the KSA, growing by over 3000% from 2011 to 2012, and, as of 2014 it “accounts for more than 50 million tweets per month” (*ibid*, p.104). Saudis are also avid YouTube users, with 90 million daily views - 65% of which come from smartphone users (*ibid.*, p.105). In terms of Facebook activity, the KSA was ranked at 33rd globally in 2014 with over 6 million registered users (*ibid*, p.104).

The number of active Twitter users in Saudi Arabia has grown exponentially in the last decade and has reached about 3 million, with recent figures showing that nearly 30% of all Twitter users in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are in Saudi Arabia, and that they generate approximately one third of all tweets coming from the MENA region (Salem, 2017).

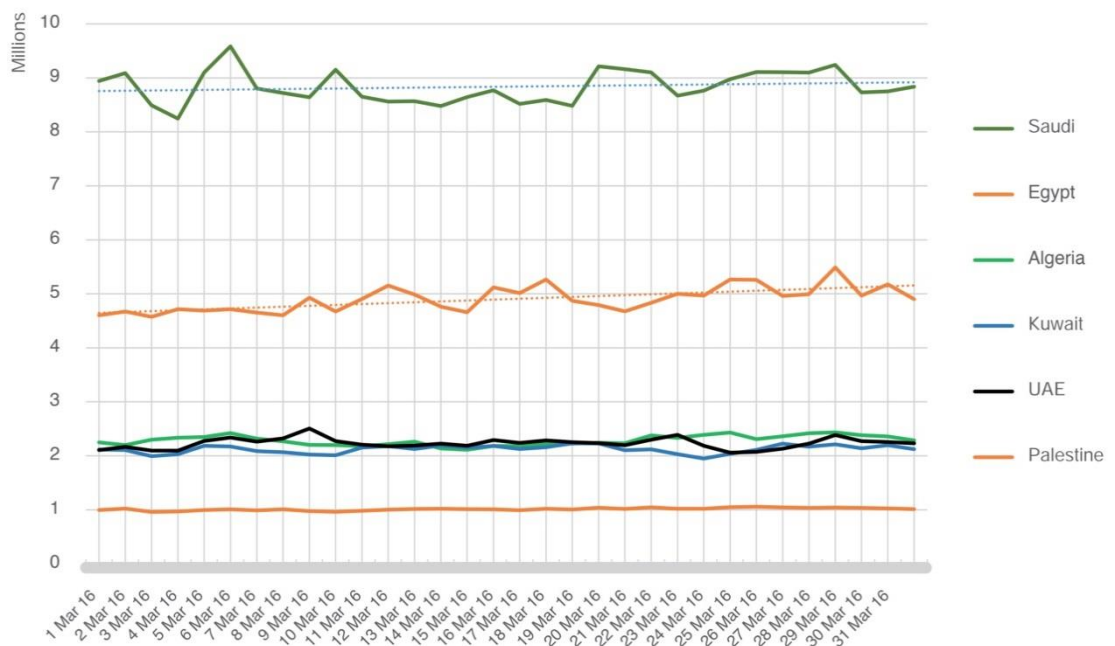


Figure 0.2: Comparison of Twitter activity in six Arab States for March 2016 (Salem, 2017).

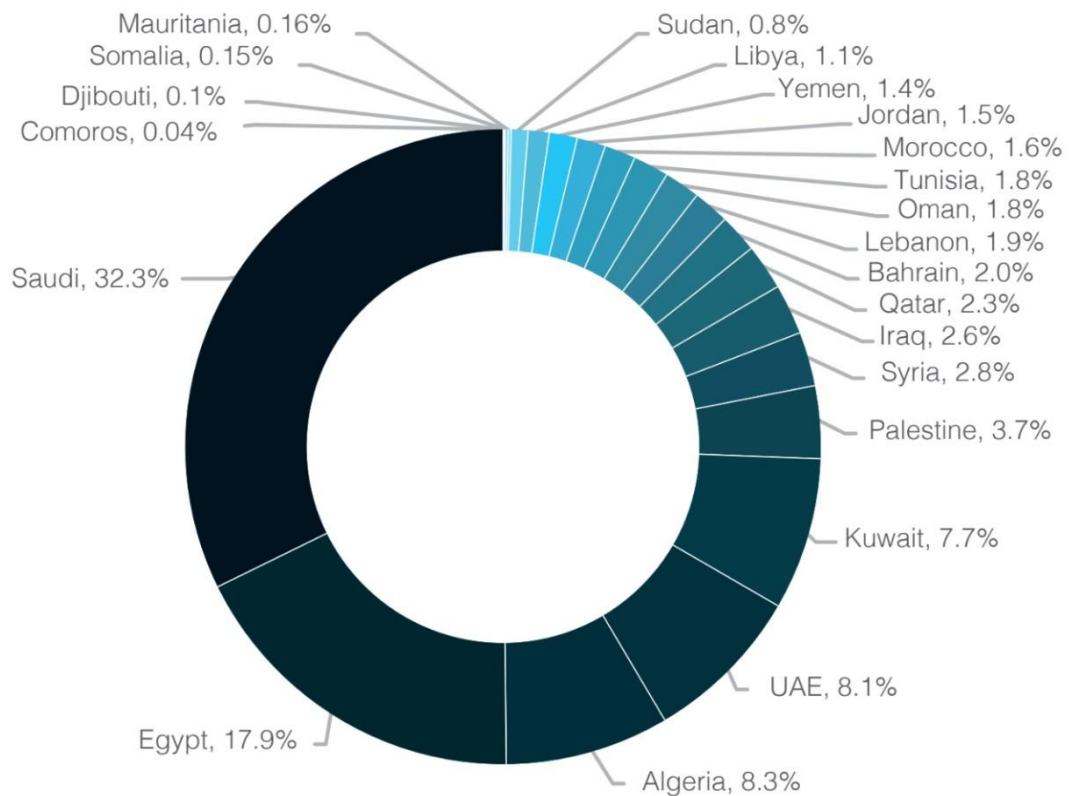


Figure 0.3: Distribution of Tweets across the Arab States (Salem, 2017)

This shows that a very high percentage of Saudis make use of SM. Likewise, the use of SM by online journals has also proceeded apace. Hussain and Ahmad (2014) found that only three Saudi online newspapers (two in Arabic and one in English), out of a total of forty two, did not use any SM tool, and that most online newspapers that did use used Twitter and Facebook as the main SM platforms to interface with their websites (*ibid.*, p.416). This can be seen as an acknowledgement by the traditional media of the importance that is given in the KSA to SM as a way of obtaining the attention of the citizens.

Investigative journalism does not feature in the traditional press in the KSA. Research conducted by Al Nassar on a sample of five Saudi newspapers showed that the order of focus of these newspapers was the following (in descending order): administrative corruption cases, local issues, sports, politics, and the economy. The study also revealed that these newspapers subscribed to the definition of journalism given by the

International Center for Journalists, focusing on concepts such as investigation, verification, searching, factual accuracy, and fact-finding, where the term “factual accuracy” is defined as knowledge or information based on real events. However, they failed to mention other key concepts, such as objectivity, and the legal dimension, including laws of access and freedom of information (Al-Riyadh, 2015). This is evidence that the concept of investigative journalism in the Saudi press has not reached yet the same level that it has in other parts of the world. It also shows that investigative journalists in the KSA face many professional and legal obstacles. In particular, the relationship between the state’s executive bodies and the media is still problematic.

The communications revolution saw a decline in the number of readers and viewers of traditional media outlets (newspapers and television), a decline which forced many media outlets to close their investigative divisions, considerably hurting investigative. There was concern that vigorous investigations into multi-national companies, such as the one into Standard Oil by Tarbell almost a century ago, would no longer be possible. Two of the largest stories that occurred during the opening decade of the 21st century—the US’s “war against terrorism” and the global financial crisis of 2008—were not covered by either traditional or new media. Contemporary journalists are now firmly embedded within the culture and the objectives of the media institutions for which they work, regardless of the topic they are meant to be covering, including war and finance (Rees, 2016). Such an absence of investigative journalism from contemporary media is one of the factors that contributed to the emergence of CJ. In the KSA, ordinary citizens do not trust the traditional media to provide basic information, and they often turn to Twitter-based CJ instead. If CJ is to succeed as an alternative to traditional media, it must offer new and innovative features.

3.6.1 Studies on Saudi CJ

Two important studies have used agenda-setting theory to explore how the media work in the KSA. Al Saud (2006) used this to explore political content in official media outlets (television and the press) in the KSA and the factors affecting responses by these outlets, such as the audience’s need for political

information, to analyse if the official media provide the political information that Saudi citizens needed. It also examined the relationship between the political system in the KSA and official media to show how they set the political agenda for their audience. Al Saud used content analysis to analyse a sample of political content in Saudi media outlets. He also surveyed a random sample of the Saudi public (n=506) about their level of trust in media coverage of politics. His findings revealed that levels of trust in the political content provided by editors in Saudi media outlets were low. He explained this result by suggesting that most of the political communication covered by Saudi media outlets, except the news function, represented public opinion as being close to the official state position, rather than acting as a two-way interaction instrument between the state and public opinion. Whilst Al Saud's study showed how Saudi state-controlled mainstream media set the agenda, this current study will examine how Saudi citizen journalists can set agendas which differ from those of state-controlled media by using Twitter.

A second study, by Albalawi (2015), examined whether leading figures on Twitter in the KSA could be used to influence agenda-setting for the purposes of health promotion. Albalawi's (2015) three-stage study began by identifying opinion leaders (a total of 99 Twitter accounts classified into 'religious', 'traditional media', 'sports-related', 'new media', 'political', 'companies' and 'health') and assessing their impact. The Diffusion of Innovations theory, specifically the Bass Model, was employed in stage two of the research to investigate how this influence can spread and to propose an informative indicator of the diffusion of successful tweets. Stage three of the research investigated the effectiveness of agenda-setting for promoting health on digital media. Albalawi suggested revising the traditional agenda-setting model at two levels to explain the findings of the project: how agendas are set in the sphere of new media, and the role of these new media in classic agenda-setting. Albalawi identified key influential figures in Saudi Twitter and how this group could be used to promote health. Although this study focused on Twitter accounts and tweets, it did not analyse the role of hashtags. In this research, hashtags which relate to economic reforms in the KSA will be analysed; and these data along with that from semi-structured interviews undertaken in the research, will be used to show how CJ shapes the PI in the

KSA. This evidence will provide the basis for the model of PICJ in the KSA presented in Chapter 7).

Rashid's (2016) study examined the use of SM by editors-in-chief and professional journalists from mainstream newspapers and its impact on forming Saudi public opinion. Although Rashid's study focuses on professional journalists rather than citizen journalists it is useful to compare the similarities and differences between the two in terms of how they impact on citizens' opinions. She used a questionnaire to survey a sample of editors-in-chief and journalists based in four Saudi newspapers (*Al Riyadh, Okaz, Al Watan* and *Al Yaum*) with the aim of identifying the ways this sample of editors-in-chief and journalists use SM, their motives for posting news, the nature and extent of their postings, and the SM platform that most influenced them. Rashid found that 47.6% of the study sample thought that SM plays a role in shaping public opinion. An overwhelming majority (92.9%) believed that Twitter had the greatest effect on Saudi public opinion.

Analysis of participants was intended to determine if—and if so, why—opinion leaders attempt to influence Saudi public opinion using Twitter. Rashid's study focused on the impact of SM on journalists and editors-in-chief in the Saudi press, but unlike the current study, it did not investigate the role played by opinion leaders on Twitter and the extent to which they not only create interest in particular issues but also shape public opinion.

To date, two studies have focused on media coverage of economic affairs in the KSA. Al Madani (2009) explored the attitudes of the Saudi economic elite towards the use of Saudi newspaper websites for economic news (*Al Riyadh, Al Eqtisadiyah, Okaz, Al Watan* and *Al Yaum* and *Al-Jazirah*), focusing on the global financial crisis of 2008. The study was intended to evaluate the performance of these newspapers and identify the extent to which they were able to keep up with the developments and changes in the global financial crisis. A questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 100 businessmen from the Saudi city of Jeddah. The study revealed that electronic journalism represents the main source of information for the economic elite in the KSA. Some 65% of the sample thought that the print press did not update sufficiently the economic elite about the global financial

crisis while online news provided all the information it needed. This enabled businessmen to identify public attitudes towards and trends in economic issues in Saudi society and the factors impacting on these issues. However, Al Madani's study did not analyse online economic content and its impact on Saudi society. It investigated rather the opinions, trends and usage of online news as a source of economic news of the Saudi economic elite in a single city context – Jeddah. This research explores cases that relate to the whole of the KSA, as the selected hashtags created a nationwide debate. Furthermore, interviewees came from a range of Saudi cities to further ensure nationwide coverage.

The most recent study focusing on the KSA is that of Jemei'a (2017) which aimed to show the relationship between mainstream media and opinion leaders. The study methodology relied on the quantitative methods, using content analysis to analyse a sample of newspaper Internet accounts (*Al Riyadh, Al Eqtisadiyah*), electronic news websites (*Sabq, Ajeel*) and Twitter accounts of five opinion leaders influencing economic affairs. Opinion leaders on Twitter were defined as those with accounts which specialized in posting on economic issues and had most followers on Twitter over a three-month period (1 September-30 November 2016).

Jemei'a's study makes use of an aspect of agenda-setting theory called agenda "melding", which refers to the process whereby individuals conform their personal agendas to those of groups that they join. Such groups can then be said to have a collective agenda and membership of that group requires individuals to adopt this agenda. This means that with easy access to media, people can now form their own opinions and then find a group that shares them, rather than having to adapt their own agendas to fit groups physically close to them, which would have been the case when people were far more restricted geographically. These KSA-specific findings reflect the more general one that new media has allowed individuals to gain access to a plethora of groups on a global basis so that individuals can select those with agendas that reflect their own (Ragas and Roberts, 2009).

Analysis showed that media outlets and opinion leaders tended to agree on economic reform issues. This supports the hypothesis of the

agenda-melding theory that the media and opinion leaders tend to limit conflict between media and audiences during the process of influencing public opinion about important social and economic issues. Study results showed that the number of postings about economic reforms by opinion leaders on Twitter was as high as 40.38% indicating that they had a significant role in creating economic content. In addition, 76% of content with an economic character on Twitter posted by opinion leaders used statistical data from international reports by economics experts to support their arguments, showing that they valued factually correct evidence and a degree of objectivity.

Moreover, the results of the study showed increasing levels of freedom of opinion and expression in Saudi society as a whole, with constructive criticism of *Vision 2030* by opinion leaders being used to serve the interests and express the needs of Saudi society and its citizens. Some 47.9% of content from opinion leaders gave a negative evaluation of economic reform, higher than would be expected in traditional media. This research builds on Jemei'a's study by providing an explanation of how individuals identified as 'citizen journalists' in this study function in ways similar to what Jemei'a calls 'opinion leaders' with regard to issues of economic reform. It will also determine and explain how citizen journalists work in the KSA and analyse the content of their tweets and hashtags using thematic analysis.

In the western context, Alzaren (2009) argues there can be no democracy without free media and free journalism. Social unity and security relies on a healthy relationship between the media and democratic institutions. CJ plays a key role in encouraging participatory democracy by offering an alternative to traditional media outlets which serve to legitimize existing power structures based on an ideology of domination (Alzaren, 2009)

Interactive CJ requires individuals to share common objectives and collective intelligence. During the 1970s, there were hopes that television would lead to interactive democracy but it is actually social media that has come closer to making this dream come true in the form of 'virtual democracy'. This new form of democracy is not based on an ability to vote remotely through the Internet but instead relies on the presence of a free and interactive space for communication. In this new social medium, CJ can actively

contribute to creating more democratic practice. Social media has provided individual citizen journalists with horizontal communication and the opportunity to direct strong criticism towards traditional media outlets such as newspapers, television and radio that present the official views of the government and fail to represent the public interest (Alzaren, 2009, p.11).

Historically, the public have not been able to publish criticism of the media which was protective of its own interests. Now, however, the interactive forms of delivery offered by digital technology mean the media's performance can be evaluated and criticised. The hierarchical model of media and communications has been transformed into a networking mode, shifting from the public perspective to a personal and individual one. The recipient of news has now become a transmitter also. Mistrust of the media has grown because most of the information broadcast on a daily basis does not reflect the reality of ordinary people's lives. Media do not help individuals to understand the changes happening in the world. Individuals face the paradox of an information overload that does not provide them with what they need to make decisions, and shrinking opportunities for popular political participation in managing public affairs.

Some experts argue that the mistrust between citizens and the media is a healthy aspect of democracy because it shows that they are not passive consumers of media products. Rather, they are conscious of the factors driving the media, whether at the level of presenting news, broadcasting, production or marketing. While citizen criticism of the media is a healthy democratic phenomenon, a lack of trust between citizens and the media in its role as a defender of democracy can be considered a serious flaw in democracy's ability to protect the space provided for free expression. As a result, this mistrust is expressed in scepticism about all news and analysis from the media and a questioning of the neutrality of its outputs. This means traditional media institutions urgently need to review their performance and principles. In addition, in order to protect democracy there is a need for an alternative media. This alternative is CJ.

CJ literature is characterized by its criticism of traditional media and evidence of its ability to carry out the same functions and roles using different

methods. CJ does not seek profits and also rejects the stakes of the market economy. Evidence of this can be found in the discourse of most CJ charters and websites. Alternative media aims to increase citizen involvement in PI issues. This is also one of the objectives of CJ. Both alternative media and CJ highlight the importance of the public's role in disseminating high quality information indicating that the margin of difference between both philosophies is very small since the interests of citizens come before those of interest groups. In the modern age, media serves as the mediator between state institutions and civil society. It conveys citizens' problems to the authority and also holds officials accountable. On this basis, CJ aims to reform the mediator's role by focusing on PI issues, criticizing executive authorities and governments, and exposing corruption. CJ has shown it is capable of fulfilling this function.

Saudi journalism made significant developments over the course of the twentieth century and these have continued more recently with the emergence of CJ. Citizen journalists initially use their blogs as personal diaries, writing about their interests in literature, culture and Islamic thought. Publications on these topics flourished but coverage of social, economic concerns and political analysis remained limited due to repressive media laws and detention of those who defy the rules. The KSA readily acknowledges that it represses the media as a means of maintaining its moral and religious standards. This has led to the enactment of laws intended to restrict citizen journalists in the same manner as their traditional counterparts. However, the growth of social media and that Internet technology within the KSA suggests there may be some interesting times ahead, as more Saudis make use of this opportunity to venture into CJ that engages more directly with political, social or economic issues.

Most of the research conducted on CJ does not take into account non-Western social and political settings. This leads to a distorted perception of what CJ entails in different parts of the world. Therefore, in countries such as the KSA, information on SM sites like Twitter can reflect general PI. Thus, this study explores the power of Twitter in the KSA, how this platform influences Saudi CJ, and how this, in turn, is shaped by Saudi

economic interests, as well as focusing on what constitutes the PI in the Saudi context and how it is affected by regulatory forces.

3.6.2 Media Effects and Related Concepts

3.6.2.1 Hypodermic Needle Theory

The hypodermic needle theory, also known as the magic bullet theory, the Hypodermic-Syringe Model, and the Transmission-Belt Model (Jeffery L. Bineham, 1988), says that the mass media has a direct, powerful, and instantaneous impact on its audiences. As one of the earliest theories in the field of journalism, it states that an intentional message is directly received, and fully recognised, by the audience. Scholars argue that the uninhibited availability and access to mass media has diminished the value and intensity of the hypodermic needle theory (Bruns & Highfield, 2012). This is because the social relationship between internet users and mass media no longer suggests a direct maximal influence. For example, Baran (2012) argues that the political inclinations of mass media and its influencers is only marginally important, as people more commonly react to media messages based on the outlet's unique personality, or in accordance with the values and interests of society. By so doing, as established by Baran and Davis (2012), the mass media and its influencers only act as moderators of news content, or as mere filters in the dissemination of mass media messages. Comparatively, McElroy (2013) believes that people still react to certain messages, which is sufficient proof of the influence of mass media, and acclaims its effects as described by the hypodermic theory (McElroy, 2013). This point of view was disputed by Jackson (2019), who observed that this was as a result of active audience members in the modern technological era, thereby suggesting that the audience itself has great potential in initiating, structuring, and orienting the communication process.

The initial model of mass communication was founded on the influence of film, propaganda, consumerism, and other areas which were deemed relevant in understanding the powerful stimulus of media on its audience. This model, known as the bullet or hypodermic needle theory, suggests that media directly structures values and mannerisms, thereby leading to social disruptions in the form of rebellion, crime, uninhibited consumption, violence,

and mass propaganda. As the media continues to influence both the social and political sector, even in the modern world, it is particularly relevant to analyse the effects of mass media as a social challenge. For instance, documentaries covering the invasions of Arab nations, such as Iraqi's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, demonstrate that US President Bush's abrupt dispatch of troops into the KSA was purposed to make it seem as though only an American military response to the Kuwait predicament was suitable, thereby supporting Bush's stand on international military involvement. Similarly, his move and involvement even in areas void of war made it appear as though conflict in other areas of the Middle East was imminent. At the time, the media propagated this idea of military involvement in the face of international crisis as unavoidable, and omitted the manner in which information was manipulated by the United States government and the Pentagon in furthering their penetration into international peace policies. This, as is also seen in occasional international reproaches towards innocent people of Arabic decent, proved that the media can dominate the public's perception of given crises, especially with the use of fast social media outlets (Jackson, 2019).

In addition, most mass media platforms currently allow for unsupervised public commenting on their public discussion forums, thereby encouraging the continuity of negative mass social behaviour in various forms, such as political activism and cyber bullying (Jackson, 2019). For instance, while official news sites have some degree of influence over the posts made on their official page, Jackson suggests that the public believes that the feature of providing comments (a feature which, for instance, Facebook provides) is an extension of what constitutes public grounds. Hence, despite the possibility that the public may be forced to adopt a certain etiquette due to the use of real identities or the presence of family on their personal platforms, the newsroom does not have much control over what is deemed as acceptable etiquette even on their own platforms. However, mainstream news providers are currently using moderating systems to ensure the eradication of insults from the main news sections of their online platforms (McQuail, 2010), but this does not guarantee that the platform will subsequently become effective in maintaining insightful public analyses and debates. Indeed, the incident in this

scenario debunks the argument that mass media, void of other technological facets, has a supreme influence on audience behaviour (Johnston, 2015).

3.6.2.2 The Power Of Media

Based on the hypodermic needle theory, messages from the media are described as “bullets” or “needles” that have the ability to reach the prospective audience and have a lasting influence upon it, which may be either instantaneous, influential over time, or psychologically significant. According to this model, the media affects the news as it is presented to the viewers or followers and alters their knowledge and mannerisms (Wayne & Murray, 2009). Bos and Brants (2014) suggest that news contents affect social beliefs, and that spending time viewing the news has a significant impact not only on the individual viewer, but on the collective of citizens as a whole. For example, broadcasting violent programmes in Saudi Arabia did not result in Saudis becoming more violent, but appeared to increase demands for justice and the prosecution of those who were guilty.

The hypodermic needle theory was acquired, in part, from the mechanical transmission model, which is based on the immediate outcomes divulged by information engineers. Hence, many studies believe that the theory does not directly apply in real-world situations (Newman, 2009). During the widespread technological advancements that brought the world the television and the radio there were global, significant concerns with regards to the European totalitarian regimes, vestiges of the Second World War. Newman believes that in the post-war era the images of the war were still fresh in the minds of people not due to the strengths of the theory behind mass media transmission, but as a result of the persuasive effects of the outcome of the war. Hence, as Newman believes, the theory’s application to mass media, especially in the present era, remains founded on assumptions, most of which are yet to be empirically examined in real-world settings.

Baran (2012) agrees that there is still little comprehension about how certain environmental and social influences may cause people to rely on mass media to satisfy certain needs. McElroy (2013), who conducted a study attempting to analyse an audience’s motives with regard to psychological and

social factors, argue that the hypodermic needle theory does have credibility, as he found that there exists a difference in how certain lifestyles interacted with specific patterns in the media. For example, in Saudi Arabia those who prefer reading magazines and newspapers or tuning into television shows may have significantly different livelihoods and jobs (for example homemakers, sedentary employees, and restrained and outgoing activists). Furthermore, whereas homemakers and sedentary employees may prefer to watch television for entertainment, activists may opt for entertainment from magazines and newspapers. Ultimately, people will react to varying news contents and media channels depending not only on the content, but also on their lifestyle and degrees of social involvement.

3.6.2.3 Two-Step Flow

The two-step flow model supports the claim that opinion leaders in the form of broadcasting channels are the main stimulus in shaping social and political values, mannerisms, and choice. According to this model, the media has no direct effect upon the behaviour of individuals, as it is resultant of primary groups, and not of personal sway. By presenting the media as nothing but passive fuel to propagate tendencies that are already present in society, this model counters the perception that the mass media is the root of social issues (Nabi & Oliver, 2009).

According to Silverman (2012), broadcasting channels have had minimal effects upon society, which is evidenced by the fact that on-air corrections are still rare: while broadcasters have, in the past, acknowledged the presence of mistakes, this was commonly done under fear of possible legal ramifications. However, Lowry (2010) believes that this was the case only because the media outlets have had much success in hiding their mistakes. In connection to this, bloggers have contributed a great deal in lessening the disgrace commonly associated with such errors. Often criticising mainstream channels for making inaccuracies, bloggers have made it known that corrections are a sign of transparency, rather than of dishonour. The values of transparency and genuine interrelations, which have been quickly accepted among several audiences, is quickly being adopted, proving that

broadcasting channels are increasingly being rejected as opinion leaders (Jackson, 2019).

Furthermore, the mass media no longer predominantly seek to shape social preferences and choices; instead, they merely arouse public interest. On media channels in the KSA, particularly those focused on health and beauty, forums are not used to influence certain behaviours, but rather to uncover the type of information that the public is most keen to hear. Similarly, in other online newspapers such as Khaleejtimes, the journalists have accepted the presence of public comments, regardless of the intention, as part of the public sphere, rather than as damaging to the image and brand of the news channel, as is the case in traditional media (Calvo-Porrall et al., 2018). To ensure that their news channels still receive a large audience in spite of the public's orientation towards opinion leaders, mainstream channels have opted to frequently relay human interest stories. For example, those tasked with generating audience input on the Saudi BBC prefer to relay stories that relate to crimes, controversy, disaster and calamities, such as the war in Iraq and feminism in the KSA, as these have been shown to consistently arouse public interest (Jackson, 2019).

Social media structurally differ from traditional media in numerous ways, most of which are characterised by a lack of symmetry between the receiver and the sender. Social media adheres to a media logic divergent from that of print outlets, radio, and television, especially in regard to its capability in maintaining its sender (i.e. the editor) as the gatekeeper. According to Neuman and Guggenheim (2011), digital technology has ensured the development of interactive linkages between the sender and the receiver, making it easier for both to bypass the initial, forceful influence of mass media. As such, social media adheres to the two-step flow because the audience on social media platform are believed to be relatively independent and significantly involved in the public's perception and creation of meaning. Bashatah (2017) suggests that a two-step process of communication is currently taking form, as the audience on social media platforms are believed to be relatively independent and significantly involved in the public's perception and creation of meaning. Bashatah established that opinion leaders, individuals whose ideas are respected and gratified by the public,

have the ability to alter dominant features on the news, including those influenced by the mass media. Consequently, information and ideologies sought by the mass media are relayed to opinion leaders, then transmitted to the wider audience. Unfortunately, in this two-step model, the media was portrayed as having limited influence, as the audience itself retained the freedom to depict their own reception of news content from the media (Bashatah, 2017).

To benefit from the growing utilisation of social media in the KSA, several companies seek to make known their presence felt on social media by using marketing activities and tools, such as social media influencers, also known as brand ambassadors (Askool, 2012). Despite the fact that the majority of these companies have millions of followers on their official channels, they still spend up to 4% of their annual revenues by employing brand ambassadors who maintain the company's social images across various platforms. Tamer (2013) established that more than half of the companies in the Middle East spent approximately \$450 million on social media marketing, more than 35% of which was targeted towards social media influencers.

A new media form of logic is evident in the current social media digital communication. Askool (2012) suggests that the current use of social media influencers, which he has termed "network media logic", centres on the utilisation of social media from three standpoints: production, distribution, and usage. The network media logic gives evidence of significantly individualised types of media content production, as compared to the traditional forms of mass media, whereby only professionals determined the content to be produced. Accordingly, the logic of distribution behind social influencers is based on virality, which is simply the creation of a network which is enhanced by word of mouth. This is common for popular Saudi online platforms, which are thus used to propagate the popularity of a product among like-minded individuals and users. The users, as opposed to the gatekeepers in mass media, subsequently decide whether the information related to the product is relevant and whether it should be passed on (Tamer, 2013). Ultimately, the use of social media influencers simply acts as a form of communication between similar populations to create niche networks centred on interest, as

opposed to location. Hence, where mass media advertisements may be restricted to geographical communities, social media communities are formed by groups of people with shared interests.

Arguably, as stated by Neuman and Guggenheim (2011), social media influencers have resulted in a dramatised form of communication, as their channels have become platforms for the creation of emotional, controversial, and productive contents typical of product advertising and marketing. These influencers, therefore, act as simulators of different marketing activities, creative video clips, memes, clickbaits, parodies, and sound bites. However, while these simulations can sometimes prove important in boosting the popularity of a given product, their recommendation is sometimes offered by people with limited knowledge of the product but who are popular on social media (Jackson, 2019). These individuals, who have marketing responsibilities outside of the organisation, may be forced to interact with the company's platforms on social media without proper regulations during their instructive social media marketing. This level of guidance requires more specialised forms of assimilation into social media marketing, particularly for the purpose of fully incorporating the company's mission, goals, vision, organisational culture, and available resources into other potential external influencers in the target community (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011).

Tamer (2013) also established that the proper use of social media influencers is restricted by the type of product offered by the company. For instance, although the food and telecommunications industries may certainly benefit from social media marketing tools, they cannot hope to compete with other sectors, such as the fashion market, which have much higher levels of competition and which therefore benefit much more greatly from hiring influencers. The automotive industry in the KSA is particularly affected by this issue, as it has experienced, over the last decade, little to no progress in enhancing interactivity through social media influencers and other social media marketing tools.

In general, in the two-step flow of communication, the messages first reach the opinion leaders before entering the social framework and the general audience. In the KSA, companies employ and support different

marketing activities capable of linking its internal competencies with the external world (Askool, 2012). However, as established by Jackson (2019), there still remains a significant amount of information to be uncovered about the use of social media influencers as brand ambassadors. The existing literature suggests that while the involvement of opinion leaders in the form of social media influencers may be beneficial in enhancing the flow of communication to a wider audience, it still has several implications on the company's performance, especially in regard to the public's perception of its managerial style and the limited comprehension of its application in other untapped sectors (Jackson, 2019).

3.7 PI in the Media

According to Freedman (2008), the concept of public interest (PI) in the media goes beyond the perception of offering wide-ranging opportunities for complete representation. He argues that the thrust of PI in media circles covers how media policies are designed and how nations nurture political and social beliefs as well as the influence of media policy at any given time (Freedman, 2008). A more precise understanding of the concept of PI in media was articulated by McQuail (1993) who starts from the premise that technological advances have created a drive for constant change in the media industry, meaning there is a need to clarify PI. He notes that:

as an adjective, the word 'public' indicates what is open rather than closed, what is freely available rather than private in terms of access and ownership, what is collective and held in common rather than what is individual and personal (McQuail, 1993, p.2).

As a noun, and within social and political theory, the term refers to "an informal, voluntary, autonomous and interacting set of citizens who share and pursue objectives and interests, especially in respect of forming opinion and advocating policy" (McQuail, 1993, p.2).

In Napoli's (2015) opinion, the concept of PI should not be seen as a rational and evaluative tool which governments can deploy to regulate the media; rather it should be viewed as a prominent means to an end by which the principles of media organisations' professional practice can be guided in a

demonstrably transparent manner. It can also be the vehicle through which the perceived needs and interests of media end users can be reflected. Napoli's (2015) definition reflects the element of 'ideology' originally highlighted by McQuail (1993), who observes that the concept of PI "is sometimes used or seen as an ideological device designed to cloak unjustified regulatory ambitions on the part of governments, or even as a weapon in the assault on more fundamental liberties of expression and of business enterprise" (p.3). He adds that the idea of PI sometimes also "connotes one particular form or media arrangement, that of 'public service broadcasting', and is involved in defence of the system" (*ibid.*).

McQuail (1993) argues that this shows that:

there is some overlap between the idea of the PI in communication and public service broadcasting, since the latter is often defined in terms of benefits which it is supposed to deliver to society: universal provision and wide-ranging appeal; services to regions and minorities; attention to national interest, identity and culture; the provision of informational and educational services beyond what the market would require (p.3).

However, he argues that it is too restrictive to identify PI with just one form of broadcasting as this neglects the fact that private communication media are also expected to deliver similar benefits for society on PI grounds (*ibid.*).

Regardless of the perception of PI, it is important to understand that the profession of journalism has historically been infused with high levels of ethical obligations to the public, irrespective of the journalistic medium being used (Napoli, 2015). In some countries, this level of ethical obligation is left up to journalists who determine this for themselves, while in others a behavioural code of conduct is imposed by regulations (*ibid.*). This means that PI can be viewed differently by different societies. PI may be explicitly imposed by recognised institutions or ambiguously imposed by means of unwritten rules and regulations that form part of the social, cultural and political foundations of a nation (Napoli, 2015; Dredge and Thomas, 2009; Venter, 2001).

With respect to this research, when citizens are viewed as the key ingredient in the establishment and practice of journalism, the concept of PI poses something of a challenge; and it could be argued that the key difference between the two is that CJ cannot necessarily be viewed as 'ethically' obligated and self-censored. Since this type of journalism may take any shape

or form, it can be used to explore anything which is judged to be of interest – hence it can be labelled as being of ‘PI’. The challenge for institutions and governments has been to apply PI as a vehicle for media regulation when the target journalists are the citizens whose perceptions of citizens’ interests may vary widely.

This issue, according to Feintuck and Varney (2006), has been compounded by the constantly changing trends in technological development and convergence, and media conglomeration that have continued apace and have continued to pose a threat to traditional public service values in broadcasting.²³ In an attempt to address such developments, regulatory regimes in the West have been substantially reformed at both the national and regional level (Feintuck and Varney, 2006). Thus, while the issue of PI can be seen by citizenry as an opportunity to influence the media positively, government institutions are more likely to see PI as critical to regulatory intervention.

Feintuck and Varney (2006, p.74) argue the term ‘PI’ can be used in relation to the entire range of media regulation issues; from privacy and media intrusion through to general matters of the relationship between the state and the media. They note that PI is inadequately defined, making it difficult to identify its specific objectives adequately, and still more difficult to assess whether the outcomes are meeting the various criteria which may be embodied in ‘the PI’ (*ibid.*). In the case of CJ, PI in the media is even more complex due to the supposed informational, cultural and social benefits that it can bring to wider society since these go beyond the immediate, particular and individual interests of those who communicate in public communication whether as senders or receivers (Feintuck and Varney, 2006, p.75). CJ needs

²³ Ofcom (the UK regulator for communications) has identified five distinctive characteristics of public service broadcasting: high quality, original content, innovative, challenges audiences to think and is widely available. Ofcom also argues that ‘trusted and impartial news’ lies at the heart of public service broadcasting’. Ofcom, (2018) *Public Service Broadcasting in the Digital Age*, p.3. (online) Available at: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf.file/0026/111896/public-service-broadcasting-in-the-digital-age.pdf

to be considered in the specific socio-cultural context that it emerges from in order to understand its relation to PI.

The argument for the creation of PI emanates from the perception that public institutions are driven by political interests; and therefore, such institutions are influenced by the self-interests of politicians as well as the conflicting societal perceptions of PI (ibid.). Berman (2011) argued that classical political philosophy believes in the concept of the 'common good', and that citizenry should be committed to this; however, the issue of self-interest questions the fundamental basis of common good. Olejarski (2011) supports the argument that what is presumed to be good for the public can fit the profile of PI; therefore, the political philosophy of the existence of a common (or public) good has the potential to create "PI". The challenge, however, lies in differences in the attributes of public good and PI; the former can be objective, tangible and visible to the public (Anderson, 2014), while PI tends to be highly subjective with a demand for broader participation and inclusion (Olejarski, 2011).

There are many interpretations of PI and, as Tambovtsev (2015) notes, the concept of 'PI' is sometimes used to justify increased state intervention in the life of society and of individual citizen on the basis of the preferences of specific groups or individuals and this can lead to the enforcement of undemocratic regulations on the media.

Cochran (cited in Tambovtsev, 2015, p. 331) identifies four main types of PI theory. These are: (1) 'abolitionist' theories that argue that the concept of PI is meaningless or lacks validity; (2) 'normative' theories that maintain that public policies should be judged ethically with reference to PI as a criterion; (3) 'consensualist' theories that frame PI as a more general concept relating to public consensus concerning policy issues, and (4) 'process' theories that consider PI to be a political concept. Some theorists focus on PI as a source of conflict between different group or individual interests while others see it as the means of reconciling diverse interests in a way that is fair and democratic.

To evaluate the creation of PI in CJ, it is vital to anticipate both objective and subjective elements because they both possess the potential to influence the perception of PI in the media within any society (see 0).

3.7.1 PI Journalism

Journalism is defined as a systematic and independent attempt to identify the facts of an event and report the issues that matter to society in an objective and timely manner (Brock, 2013). Hence, it is important for the Fourth Estate, i.e. the press and news media in general, to structure their practice around what is deemed important within society and to perform their duties in a way that demonstrates a responsibility to benefit society (Morton and Aroney, 2015). Brock (2013, p.192) argues that PI entails the following principles:

- The interests of a community that go on to form a collective identity;
- Information that advances benefits or prevents harm to the audience and, by extension, towards society;
- Free flow of information and/or full disclosure, together with a reluctance to limit communication.

Many researchers have examined how PI affects the forms of stories, coverage and news items that journalists and media outlets choose to provide to their communities. It is commonly presumed that PI is a fundamental practice in journalism (Morton and Aroney, 2015); however, the notion of PI has evolved over time, like journalistic practice. Morton and Aroney (2015) maintain that a journalist's interpretation of PI is subjective since journalism has become an increasingly individual practice due to the emergence of more independent platforms that produce and disseminate media reports with the advent of SM and the Internet. Arguably, such individual and subjective interpretation of PI through CJ gives a voice to those people who Morton and Aroney (2015) describe as "excluded from participation in the public sphere", acting as an alternative to the "tabloidization and infotainment expressiveness and show" that purports to be in the PI (2015, p.18).

When examining policy documents, legal judgements and codes of conduct, media scholars have found that there is a discrepancy between theoretical constructions of PI and journalists' actual understanding of the term (Brock, 2013). Morrison and Svennevig (2007) found that both regulators and professional journalist guidelines single out PI as a justification to intrude on privacy. Furthermore, no rigorous definition of PI is given to journalists;

therefore, media organisations operate without regulation and merely make assumptions in regard to their interpretation of PI, although media organisations operate with the general understanding that PI journalism documents the values and identity of a society (Morton and Aroney, 2015).

In general, the media are perceived to be a unifying factor and it is believed that the information they provide can facilitate collective change and legitimise the actions of powerful institutions and individuals (Happer and Philo, 2013). In the KSA, the Saudi Basic Law of Media emphasizes that the role of the media in relation to PI is to “strengthen the unity of the nation.” It also emphasises that it is in the PI to be informed about what is happening in the world and to have access to matters that citizens need to know about in order to make informed decisions about issues that affect their lives and livelihoods (Rifai, 2014; Happer and Philo, 2013). Therefore, it is important to understand how the media ensures that they reflect PI and highlight issues that are pertinent to their community.

Table0.1 Key Features of CJ and how these relate to the Saudi context

AUTHOR	KEY FEATURES OF CJ	HOW THIS RELATES TO THE KSA
Pateman (1970)	CJ is a democratic practice as it encourages people to participate in decision-making,	Technology (internet) makes every citizen a publisher but there is a lack of professionalism in journalistic practice. ²⁴
Rosen (1991)	The democratic functions of CJ: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- To address readers as engaged in public life, not just passive recipients of information. 2- To give citizens directions for action 3- To provide a platform for public discussion. 	Content may transgress religious prohibitions and/or traditional values and be subject to censorship.
Grimes (1999)	CJ enables citizens to participate in public discussion as civic journalism.	Content may transgress religious prohibitions and be subject to censorship.
Chaffee & Metzger (2001)	CJ changes the nature of agenda setting; the people tell the media what the issues are.	CJ on social media indicates to the traditional press the issues that citizens want to read about.
Bowman &Wills (2003)	CJ provides accurate and independent content. Unlike professional journalism, CJ does not require editor approval before publishing.	Digital media acts as a watchdog of government activity. This is possible on platforms such as Twitter where no editorial approval is required

²⁴ Professionalism in this context refers to licensed membership of the Saudi Journalists Association (See 5.1 for details of membership requirements).

Held (2006)	CJ functions as part of democracy by allowing participation in decision-making.	It provides a democratic space for discussion within a non-democratic context.
Schudson (2008)	CJ is public in that it is a forum for opinions from every social level, as far as possible.	Technology (internet) potentially makes every citizen a publisher. Not all citizens have a journalistic background and the lack of professionalism in journalism opens the door for citizen experts to inform the public.
Allan & Thorsen (2009)	CJ is a source of eyewitness reports from citizens present at extreme events, like natural disasters and terrorist attacks.	Citizen journalists make use of videos and pictures to provide evidence for their reports as the authorities may deny what is being said.
Jurrat (2011)	Grassroots-type CJ is carried out by users who find themselves in the middle of a news event and then document this event by text-video and photos.	New forms of media, such as social media, need new forms of regulation.
Dare (2011)	CJ appears when users create online content without waiting to find it in traditional media. Unlike traditional media, CJ represents an immediate response to events’.	CJ does not require long procedures to publish content.
Netley & Hemner (2012)	Some young people now view the editorial role as unnecessary and see CJ as reliable as mainstream media reporting.	CJ does not require long procedures to publish content.

3.8 CJ and PI in the KSA

CJ in Saudi Arabia, as in many parts of the world, increasingly relies upon the Internet to generate and report news. At the grassroots level, CJ extends conversation without government backing or regulation. This relates to the perception that the Internet increases political influence due to its extensive coverage and accessibility and is less likely to be traced back to the respective journalists by governments (Robinson and Deshano, 2011). In addition, web production is protected by its characteristic of being a form of mass collaboration and a digital commons that also increases communal connections (Robinson and Deshano, 2011). Therefore, this potentially leads to the perception that CJ is likely to be credible, as such journalism works for PI.

Overall, civic engagement in journalism has had a positive impact on improving the credibility of media, due to the fact that it permits non-conventional news agencies to report matters that concern the public and reflect public perception. Most importantly, it has created democratic spaces for citizen participation, which enable individuals with the responsibility to determine the direction of media outlets, whilst simultaneously demonstrating to government agencies that the press is a social platform and not a government entity.

3.8.1 PICJ in the KSA

As shown previously, when citizen journalists in the KSA call for the public to actively participate in relation to economic issues, they give them the information required to undertake these actions. In doing this, they take on responsibilities for their communities. CJ in the KSA is characterised by this call to action, the provision of the information needed to take action, and the promotion of a more well-informed discussion. Matters of public interest are seen as being directly linked to the right of the citizens to know what occurs in their communities and in the world, and citizen journalists provide information and answer questions on issues that directly affect the lives of ordinary Saudis, as with the Saudi Vision 2030 and the white lands tax and

other crucial economic issues (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4.1). Some of the citizen journalists interviewed for this thesis stated that they also explained basic economic terms, such as 'inflation', 'budget' and 'balance', to Saudis looking to learn these terms (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.2).

3.8.2 Media Mobilization

One of the most important ways that public opinion was mobilized in the KSA during the 1980s was by means of cassette recordings. For example, certain religious leaders made use of cassettes to exhort their followers to attend religious ceremonies or resist enemies, as was the case with cassettes that issued a *jihad* against the Russian occupying forces in Afghanistan. Cassettes were a means to alter opinion, especially when the message contained in them was disseminated by ardent campaigners over a wide area. Debating *jihadi* issues could be categorised as propaganda, which has been defined as the dissemination of information, true or otherwise against the state (Dahlgren, 2005).

In non-democratic countries it is not generally permissible to publish anti-government information, including criticism of government officials and projects, or how it spends money and conducts its affairs. Doing so is regarded as an offence and is sometimes punishable by imprisonment, as a means of curbing ideas that are perceived to be dangerous and might encourage revolt if people feel they are being treated unfairly. In spite of such *jihadist* views being labelled 'propaganda' by scholars such as Alboloshy (2000) and Alobied (2012), their dissemination was arguably intended to create a public sphere.

An early example of the successful use of media by Islamic clergy to communicate to the masses can be found in the Salafist *Sahwa* [literally, awakening] movement in the 1980s, which used cassette tapes in addition to the more usual books, flyers and brochures to campaign for a more traditional Islamic rule (Alobied, 2012). The *Sahwa* movement gained the trust of some Saudis who opposed Arab regimes, became a dominating force in the public sphere after the first Gulf War in Kuwait and took advantage of Saudi anger about reports regarding Iraqi aggression against

Kuwait that were published in traditional media. However, Alobied (2012, p.4) argues that in trying to take control of the public sphere the discourse of the *Sahwa* movement effectively prevented freedom of expression and proper debate.

Sahwa discourse centred around two important issues. Firstly, the unwanted US presence on Arab territory and the subsequent emergence of Al Qaeda, a phenomenon which did not suddenly appear fully formed in 1988-89, as is sometimes suggested (Almoussa, 2012). Much of the ideology of al-Qaeda had already been developed by writers such as Hassan Banna and Sayyid Qutb; and the latter's works *Milestones* and *Social Justice in Islam* throw light on the *jihadist* ideology of that early period (Quiggin, 2010). The second issue related to whether Saudi women should be allowed to drive. *Sahwa* discourse took a stance against both these issues and appealed to Saudis' horror of sedition and breaking articles of faith to alert them to the hazards of allowing either (Alobied, 2012, p.4). Using such tactics to appeal to the emotions is common in managing public opinion.

In the mid-1990s, however, the then Saudi monarch King Fahd fell ill and his brother Prince (and subsequently, King) Abdullah reigned unofficially. The latter proved to be more tolerant of other cultures and, once king, he opened the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue in 2004 to encourage participation in discussion on social equality and justice by ordinary citizens (Awad, 2010) The Centre strove to establish an environment that would gain credibility with a broad audience where individuals such as journalists and employees from civil organizations as well as social activists could debate issues such as access to the Internet and freedom of the press (*ibid.*).

However, such arenas for debate in the KSA where public opinion could be shaped by the mosques or the ruling monarchy have been fairly limited and directed by elites such as the monarchy or religious leaders. As all offline media is strictly regulated by government, it was not possible to create a public sphere similar to those seen in the West. From the mid-1990s, however, things began to change, due to better access to international media and the emergence of satellite broadcasting and online

communication in the KSA. The public was able to debate issues other than those aired in the official media (Al Qarni, 2004). Al Qarni also points out that: "The Internet has not only been a public sphere where Arabs exchange views and formulate opinions regarding political issues, but also a place for political activism outside formal state control" (*ibid.*, p.252). In reference to the Arab world, other scholars, however, have warned that "Cyber ghettos threaten to undercut a shared public culture and the integrative societal function of the public sphere, and they may well even help foster intolerance where such communities have little contact with or understanding of one another" (Dahlgren, 2005, p.152).

According to Dahlgren (2005, p.175) 'it can be argued that the Internet has also contributed to increased freedom in Arab media and reduced the role of gatekeepers in [official state regulated] newspapers and other media". Douai and Nofal (2012) explore the nature of the Arab public sphere which has resulted from the emergence of the Internet and changed the way Arabs communicate with the world. These authors use the example of reactions to the prohibition on minarets in Switzerland²⁵ and to the construction of a mosque at Ground Zero, on the site of the Twin Towers destroyed in the 9/11 attacks in New York to explore how such issues are framed by the Arab public sphere. When online comments posted by readers of Al Jazeera.net and Al-Arabiya.net were analyzed, this showed that this emergent Arab public sphere enabled Arab citizens to challenge and by-pass controls imposed by the authorities. The study also reveals how the existence of this Arab public sphere can have serious repercussions worldwide on domestic policy decisions.

Similarly, Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2015) argue that debates on SM about the disastrous floods in the KSA in 2009 occurred at a time when there were strict controls over citizen participation in public matters. The authors used qualitative thematic analysis to demonstrate that SM

²⁵ Against all expectations, the Swiss voted to ban the construction of new minarets, although their government and most political parties had rejected a ban. A majority of Swiss voters obviously felt that there are problems with Muslim integration into civil society at the moment.

circumvented government restraints and allowed people to communicate their concerns about the gravity of the situation. Although the discussions on the SM platforms such as *Al-Saha Al-Siyasia* [political forum] were rational in nature, this debate functioned more like a useful means of understanding the feelings of the people, as it was unlikely to be the sole cause of any social change. However, SM discussions of this type can facilitate trends towards change that is already happening in other countries and, by and large, Arab governments are wary of the power that SM have to subject them to pressure (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015). In addition, Twitter is now transformed into informatics and news where information accounts, news and news translated from English to Arabic are activated (Bahabri, 2017). SM have provided a platform for citizens in Arab states to engage online using their own language, and allowed a powerful critique of oppressive regimes to the point a significant impact has been made on the region's social and political reality, not least because women's voices are heard. However, the freedom and anonymity afforded by such platforms also enable the posting of offensive comments (Bajnaid and Sreedharanm, 2018).

Badawi (2015) asserts that Western studies focus more on the problems facing online users, whereas Arab studies focus more on the ethics and regulation of new media outlets. For example, Darweesh's study (2002) revealed the plethora of legislation regulating the Internet in the US and their comparative scarcity in Arab countries. Badawi (2015) stressed the need to issue new laws controlling the content of the Internet, since due to its speed and the spontaneous nature of its content, it cannot be controlled by editing and revising regulations. Some studies have focused on identifying the media's work ethic in the electronic environment and Badawi (2015) formulated charters for media operating in the general digital environment which focused on issues such as on online regulation, citizen journalists' rights, credibility of online news, and libel of online content.

Western studies such as those by Bardzel (2008) and Bermejo (2009) have raised the problem of credibility of the new media and the participation of citizen journalists and the challenges they face. Bardzel (2008) devised a 'New Media Theory Primer', arguing that there was a need to test the

functions of technological media tools in their cultural context according to these theories. In the same context, van Dijck (2009) studied the links between user-generated content and the concept of user agency. He revealed new media's ability to produce a culture based on the participation of the normal citizen.

3.8.3 Saudi Media Control and PI Issues

Tensions currently existing in the KSA can be traced to the passing of media laws and policies as well as to certain developments in the Saudi press. Firstly, conflicts between what can be seen as modernising forces (the educated cultural elite and some members of the Al-Saud royal family) and conservative forces (leading Islamic clerics and the AlShayk family) have had a strong impact on the nature of Saudi government and media development. Secondly, the government, and in particular the MoCI, has tried to control the media by assuming legal control over print and electronic media, to avoid internal or external threats to the state.

The advancement of online news sources has resulted in readers and viewers switching from traditional media to new sources of information. Indeed, several studies have discussed how the rise of new media has impacted both journalists and the public in the KSA (Kraidy, 2013; Awad, 2010; Al-Qarni, 2004). In the KSA, both national and international stories published on SM by citizen journalists are able to circumvent the kinds of censorship exercised on traditional media, a factor that may account for the interest of Saudi online newspapers in SM. It should be noted, however, that censorship is also exercised by online newspapers themselves, and not just the government; six of the online editors interviewed by Alotaibi (2017) reported having no issues with state censorship. The editor-in-chief of *Sabq* noted that anyone can complain to the MoCI about any article, and that *Sabq* usually publishes an apology if they are shown to have been incorrect and it gives space to the publication of an opposing view. Online newspaper editors are aware that their sites can be blocked, meaning they would lose their readership and must bear this in mind when publishing material that the traditional press would not print. Although the Internet delivers news instantly

to a wide audience allowing users to comment, it is still important to win the trust of the audience, who expects news to be reliable and truthful (Awad, 2010).

Harsh treatment of citizen journalists can evoke international interest, as was the case when a leading Saudi blogger, Fouad Al Farhan, was sentenced to 137 days of imprisonment for having discussed the advantages and disadvantages of being a Muslim (Bukhari, 2011). Although this case was not reported by the official Saudi press, possibly under orders from the government, Saudi bloggers spread news of it via the Internet and reports were disseminated widely through media such as international TV channels. As a result, Reporters without Borders demanded the release of Fouad Al Farhan (*ibid.*). This case demonstrates how the criminalisation of a journalist who was simply pursuing a debate can turn into an issue of international concern, and how organisations like Reporters without Borders can act as a check on government censorship (Awad, 2010; Kraidy, 2013).

According to traditional media, online media work around the strictures of their profession in an attempt to try to win their audiences over, and because of this they sometimes label online media as providers of 'fake news'. Such accusations are met with scepticism by regular users of online platforms and those readers who have a better level of political awareness (Guaaybess, 2013). Furthermore, when the government directs these accusations towards bloggers, its actions are met with criticism, and blocking websites simply leads to the appearance of others. Alsaeed (2004) suggests that because traditional journalists in the KSA are using Internet sources increasingly often, this may be having a positive impact on the assessment of their credibility.

Due to SM, Arab citizens have gained an outlet to discuss issues such as high taxation, police brutality, and the government's misuse of public funds (Khondker, 2011). State corruption is exposed on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube by showing the opulent lifestyles of public officials and their families in countries where ordinary people are poverty-stricken; Tunisia's President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was publicly

embarrassed by the streaming of a video of his wife using a government jet for her shopping expeditions to Europe (Howard et al, 2011).

In the Saudi context, one can point to the well-known journalist Abdul Aziz Alsuwayed, who has written for *Al-Riyadh* and *Al-Eqtisadiyah* and is now a columnist for *Al-Hayat*. His tweets and re-tweets were used to raise awareness about the spread of the SARS virus, criticising the government for failing to alert the public about its spread or how to prevent contamination. His efforts encouraged direct feedback from Twitter users, meaning criticism of the government was higher on this platform than in the official press and even than in some online newspapers. Possibly as a result of the response to his tweets, an article by Alsuwayed entitled 'The Battle of the Camel', published in *Al-Hayat*, included a Twitter link. Alsuwayed commented cynically on the Minister of Health's advice to avoid camel products, suggesting that the Minister should post updates about the epidemic on his website. This issue attracted a lot of public attention and illustrates how tweets can put pressure on officials to manifest accountability. This process is different from the one used by the official press: even the newspapers with websites that accept online comments must send these to a gatekeeper, who may suppress them or choose to publish them after several hours (Alotaibi, 2017)

In 2011, a group of Saudi women used Facebook to create a page, called *Baladi*, devoted to the issue of female suffrage. Concerns that similar demands might spread through SM may have encouraged King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz to issue a Royal Decree promising women they could vote and stand in the 2015 municipal elections and would sit on the Saudi council (*Shura*) in the next session (BBC, 2015)²⁶. These cases demonstrate how CJ in the KSA has contributed to PI, which is one of the key concern of this thesis.

²⁶ Before King Abdullah's death in January 2015, he appointed 30 women to the *Shura*. Saudi women also participated and stood as candidates in municipal elections for the first time in 2015, winning 13 seats, a significant progress for women in the public sphere in the KSA (BBC, 2015).

3.8.3.1 SM and PI in the KSA

As previously noted, public life in the KSA is notably constrained due to the prevalence of regulatory laws on public assembly, media, and public participation (Rifai, 2014; Stenslie, 2012). However, SM provides Saudi citizens with an open space for public assembly through virtual interaction, communication and political discourse. In fact, SM journalism can be viewed as a reaction to the mainstream industry's inability to reflect news that portrays the regime negatively. According to Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2015), SM provides Saudis with a means to express their dissatisfaction and dissent towards the government. Some scholars have suggested that social media are "an arena for opposition", as they provide a space where citizens are able to apply pressure on the government to act on their concerns (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015, p.95).

One example of citizens exerting public pressure on government stems from a leaked video of the then Health Minister, Ahmed Alkhateeb , in a heated exchange with a citizen. Alkhateeb was seen gesturing angrily and shouting at his interlocutor, a citizen who had come to speak to him about conditions in a private hospital in Riyadh. Alkhateeb loudly dismissed the man, prompting a commotion in the crowd gathered around them. Unfortunately for Alkhateeb, the video clip was shared widely on SM, especially on Twitter, and even managed to gain coverage in mainstream circles and online press, such as *Al-Arabiya*.

Conversations on SM then called for Alkhateeb 's dismissal following his behaviour, pointing out that the Ministry had previously had issues in appropriately addressing citizens' concerns in relation to the state of hospitals and medical care (*Al-Arabiya*, 2015). Other members of the public challenged the actions of the then Health Minister. The Saudi government bowed to public pressure and shortly afterwards King Salman appointed Ali al-Sheikh as Health Minister while *Al-Arabiya* (2015) reported that the Saudi Defence Minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, decided that the government should pay for treatment for the father of the man involved in the confrontation with Khateeb.

Scholars have recognised how SM enables citizens of Arab nations to communicate with the government regarding issues that affect them and to comment on public affairs (Al-Saggaf & Simmons, 2015; Fung et al., 2013). Even though social action has changed through the digital era, as online communication now has to deal with broader institutional and political contexts, it could be argued that, in countries such as the KSA, SM still reflects general PI. In fact, SM journalism and PI were derived from Saudi SM, which reflects the dynamic relationship between professional journalists and the news industry, compared to citizen journalists and bloggers (Bruns, 2012) (see p.125). One of the indicators used in the Media Sustainability Index (2005) is the plurality of news sources; arguably, it was the use of SM that allowed Saudis to experience this. Moreover, news items coming from SM in the region reflect different interests, independence in broadcasting, and transparency compared to news items from the traditional media. Meanwhile, the increasing use of technology for journalism and reporting raises crucial questions with regards to the importance of technology in the news making and delivery process for certain Saudi journalists and citizen journalists.

In light of the contradictions raised in Yamani's (2008) paper, it is interesting to note that social media is also used by pro-Western Saudi 'liberals' in deals with the regime, and certain well-known Saudis who are part of the traditional elite run some of the liberal satellite channels (Yamani, 2008). Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the media is attempting to find ways to respond to PI and provide information that is relevant to the public. The plurality of Saudi media culture is a demonstration of diverse interests, and citizens' accessibility to information affects them on a daily basis. However, this is not reflected in the independence of news broadcasters, even if they are owned and/or operated by the powerful regime-inclined elite.

Recent events may begin to change how citizens perceive media and how they are able to use it to drive their own agenda. One particular instance of public pressure from citizens on the government was a leaked clip of the former Health Minister, Ahmed Alkhateeb, seen in a heated exchange with a citizen, making angry gestures and shouting at his

interlocutor. Scholars have carried out thematic analysis of the kind of content Saudis access on popular SM platforms like Twitter and Facebook in order to theorise the PI in relation to the KSA context. Aman and Jayroe (2013) found, for instance, that Internet-based media have increased political participation among all Arabian Gulf citizens (from Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar) as well as Saudis, as they call for more social, political and economic reforms. There have been various instances where SM use in the KSA has gained attention from international media, therefore legitimising the concerns of citizens, especially in the face of political challenges. Some examples will serve here to illustrate this.

In March 2011, the activist Faisal Ahmed Abdul-Ahad was killed by Saudi security forces for demonstrating and a 'Day of Rage' was organised on Facebook (Matthiesen, 2012). Around 36,000 people visited the page which was used to demand "an elected *Shura* council to replace the consultative body appointed by the King, an independent judiciary, the release of all political prisoners, and the right to exercise freedom of expression and assembly" (Mabon, 2012, p.3).

Twitter has also been used for campaigning for the release of political prisoners and about the abuse of human rights, for example on @e3teqal (Matthiesen, 2012, p.629). The BBC's Arabic television service interviewed Khaled Al-Johani who was shown alone in Riyadh on the 'Day of Rage' and subsequently imprisoned. This prompted the setting up of a Facebook page 'Where is Khaled?' which was visited by thousands while his six-minute interview was shown on YouTube.

Events may change how citizens perceive media and how they are able to use them to drive their own agenda. Twitter hashtags are created by users and enable other micro-bloggers to generate content that is related to the hashtag and accumulate followers who subsequently move the news across different channels. As previous examples have shown, in the KSA, Twitter has been effective in enabling certain news items to gain international attention, which has influenced the perception of SM's use and impact both within and outside the region.

Therefore, it can be argued that SM, rather than mainstream media, reflect PI in the KSA, and that there is one significant instance where such a pattern can be noted both in national and international coverage. Recently, the Saudi king dismissed the Water and Electricity Ministry following citizen protests on SM over price hikes. Many citizens took to SM to express their anger over what they considered to be “unprecedented” and “unexpected” changes, especially following the fall in oil prices, which has severely affected the KSA’s economy (AFP, 2016). The Water and Electricity Ministry, Abdullah al-Hussayen, made the decision to remove subsidies for utilities such as electricity, water, and other services that usually enjoy government subsidies, i.e. education, health and petrol. This move, together with increased service charges, provoked citizen protests and anger on SM platforms. Subsequently, King Salman ordered the immediate dismissal of al-Hussayen, who was summoned before the *Shura* council in relation to the changes he had made. Although members of the public were unconvinced by the action taken by the government, media coverage and responses reflect the way that SM have grown into a platform that not only informs both citizens and government about events taking place in the KSA but may also result in action being taken.

While the AFP (Agence France Presse), the first international agency to provide news in Arabic, gave prominent coverage to King Salman’s action following the citizens’ protest, Saudi press gave more prominence to the fact that citizens gathered outside the National Water Company in protest, although the report did not reflect fully on the reasons for their anger, which was the billing system (*Saudi Gazette*, 2016). The demonstrations and the reasons for them were originally covered on SM, and then picked up by the Saudi press and this resulted in the dismissal of the minister, which was covered by the international media. Having seen the advantages of SM, mainstream media outlets in the KSA have set up accounts to disseminate news and gauge PI. *The Saudi Gazette* (2015, n.p.) observed, for instance, that Twitter offers media outlets a “solid base for breaking news, pictures, and videos.” Hence, this multimedia platform enables all kinds of coverage and immediacy in accessing information, and instituting campaigns that elicit or reflect PI. Twitter is both an informative and interactional tool, and is a

decisive way of disseminating information, and guarantees an audience, since the KSA's "online population continues to grow at a faster rate than in most advanced nations" (*Saudi Gazette*, 2016: n.p.).

In addition to mainstream SM and Internet-based platforms, Saudis have been able to institute their own online media platforms that encompass the public sphere. For instance, the Saudi-owned *Al-Arabiya*'s site enables citizens to discuss matters of the greatest concern to them, notably political news items (Al-Saggaf, 2006). The availability and accessibility of the site aligns with Habermasian public sphere principles which suggest that a sphere can be considered public when it allows citizens to form opinions on issues of general interest and includes the participation of people from diverse backgrounds (Habermas, 2014). Furthermore, *Al-Arabiya* is characterised by participants with a variety of interests, backgrounds, ethnicities and, perhaps most importantly, it attracts both male and female contributors.

This study builds on research in the KSA that focuses on the economic crisis and the role of Twitter in CJ. However, it describes this practice using a qualitative approach that affords a deeper analysis of how CJ is actually practiced and highlights its particular features. In this way, the study aims to reveal new insights into CJ practice in the KSA and explore the role of Twitter in PICJ by an innovative approach to analysing content posted on Twitter during the economic crisis of 2015/2016.

3.8.3.2 PI, Economic Issues, and SM in the KSA

The coverage of economic affairs arguably constitutes one of the most prominent news areas in the KSA, as oil prices govern much of the Kingdom's economy on both a national and global scale. For the most part, reports on economic news have been the responsibility of the Saudi Monetary Agency (SAMA), a government agency which tends to offer positive feedback on the state of the economy and is thus not objective. In 2015, for instance, SAMA reported that economic growth had increased year on year from 2.7% to 3.5%, while ignoring the falling price of oil and the possible negative repercussions that this would entail. Thus, SAMA's 2015

report contrasted markedly with reports by both the World Economic Outlook and the International Monetary Fund, which reported that the KSA's national GDP had reduced by 0.1% to 3.4%. Consequently, citizen journalists have attempted to draw attention to the possible declining state of the Saudi economy in their own reports. It is in the PI for citizens to understand how the parlous state of the economy will impact on their lives and certainly they themselves indicate what it is they need to know. Information regarding PI in the KSA tends to be derived from data relating to the way individuals utilise media platforms, especially SM, which has changed accessibility to news and information in the region. Citizen journalists can now tweet criticism of issues which they see as being of PI such as *Vision 2030* and tax on water bills. They inform citizens about these and discuss them, something which would not have been possible in traditional Saudi media.

Twitter users often go to Google to get further information on the issues they are discussing and search trends on Google within the KSA demonstrate that the most prevalent economic matters of PI are unemployment, wages and house ownership (or lack of it) (Global Search Trends, 2016). For example, keyword searches using 'jobs in the KSA' and 'news of the KSA' requesting that the search had to include those terms (100% of the time in the case of the former), highlighted that individuals use the Internet to research issues that affect them personally. In 2013, for instance, Twitter users launched a campaign in the region called "my salary does not meet my needs" (Altuwajiri, 2013). A total of 17 million tweets reflected the excessive level of dissatisfaction from Saudi citizens regarding their wages, terms of employment and the general state of the economy (Altuwajiri, 2013). Many individuals remarked that even when salaries increase, the cost of living also increases, meaning that a wage gap persists.

An important issue that arose towards the end of 2014 was that of the so-called 'white lands' tax (see 0) especially in urban areas such as in Riyadh, since throughout much of the KSA, land is kept as a form of personal speculative investment (Nereim and Fattah, 2015). Saudi media frequently relayed reports relating to the *Shura* Council's decision to tax undeveloped parcels of land by up to 2.5% in the cities as a result of the housing crisis (Nereim and Fattah, 2015). Hundreds took to Twitter in

response to the news using the phrase “housing is a thought problem”, which generated content including satirical posts and political cartoons on the topic. This phrase was used by the Minister of Housing to mean that the housing crisis was not so much a matter of inadequate land or resources but bad planning (Nereim and Fattah, 2015). The *Shura* responded by issuing a statement on Twitter explaining the reason for taxing previously untaxed ‘white land’.

This participation by the *Shura* Council on a SM platform reflects the place of tradition and religion in Saudi PI. Marghalani *et al.* (1998) noted that religion and social forces affect various aspects of Saudi life, including the media. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the low frequency of female personalities in news items. The KSA is known for restricting women’s freedoms and more conventional aspects of popular culture due to social and religious traditions (Long, 2005). In the KSA, tradition and religion deeply affect economic issues such as female employment (the prohibitions on women working alongside men, or until very recently having jobs involving driving) and banking (Islamic regulations restricting *riba* (the imposition of interest on financial loans)).

Aside from reflecting PI, platforms like Twitter have also contributed valuable insights into the lifestyle, expectations and demands of people in the KSA, which is important in the online era (Ristow, 2013). Most importantly, it provides valuable qualitative and quantitative data on contemporary news creation and circulation in the KSA, as it observes how PI is highlighted by the way micro-bloggers, including citizen journalists on Twitter in the country create and circulate news items and current issues (Alghamdy, 2011). Altuwajiri (2013), highlights that tweets reflect public concern with the state of the economy and the inability to afford goods and services.

The concept of PI has critical implications for journalism (Andersson and Wadbring, 2015). To journalists the development of PI is a critical factor in deciding which information should be communicated to citizens. However, it would be impossible to expect the political class of any nation to freely grant access to any information to all public spheres of society. It was

observed that PI has been critical to the process of creating media regulatory frameworks within the international community; and that real PI journalism is only achievable when the media environment allows for public participation to drive a balanced view of interest from all stakeholders, be they public institutions or society in general. Citizen journalists are expected to pursue PI as they understand it in the highly digitised SM environment; moreover, in doing so it is important that they have an ethos of taking responsibility for at least trying to ensure that the virtual communities that are called into being by their activities value the role of informed debate. It could be argued that, particularly in the Saudi context, CJ represents the voice of the citizenry more than the traditional press (Cowling and Hamilton, 2010).

Finding the balance between PI and the interests of the authorities can be an ongoing issue for any society (Dempsey and Gruver, 2012) and this suggests that PI should continually be a factor in CJ, regardless of the form that this PI takes. As a concept, PI is subject to being constantly misunderstood and misinterpreted (Jackson, 1997), but it offers a great opportunity for journalists to engage regulators as and when there is a need for dialogue for the betterment of information dissemination to society.

The continued development of information and communication technologies can only guarantee that while the topic of PI will resurface on many occasions in the future, it is impossible to predict the medium which will dominate the discussions. At different times, television news and print media have proved cardinal to the regulatory framework that enables PI (Venter, 2001); nowadays the situation has been altered because of the power of SM. It is, therefore, imperative that research continues to examine the impact of SM platforms such as Twitter on how CJ shapes PI in the KSA. This is the central concern of this thesis.

Table 0.4: Key features of PI and how they relate to the Saudi context

AUTHOR	KEY FEATURES OF PI	HOW THIS RELATES TO THE KSA
McQuail (1993)	PI refers to the shared interest of citizens to form opinions and advocate policy.	What is judged to be PI by CJ is subjective and can be applied to almost anything.
Feintuck & Varney (2006)	The issue of PI affects all aspects of media regulation, including intrusions on privacy and how the state relates to the media. This is further complicated in CJ.	Compared to new media, traditional media in the KSA is very slow because of all of the bureaucracy involved, where social media can report news events practically in real time.
Freedman (2008)	Ideas about PI affect how media policies are created and how these influence the way that governments seek to shape social and political beliefs at any particular time.	Non-democratic governments wishing to shape social and political beliefs have to challenge CJ with their own on-line presence. Thus the Saudi government had to allow implementation of these technologies while trying to develop methods of censorship without a lot of success.
Olejarski (2011)	What is good for the public is in the PI; therefore, political philosophy of the existence of 'common good' (or public good) has the potential to create 'PI'.	In the KSA, there are issues that divide 'the public' (e.g. female suffrage) so there is disagreement about what constitutes 'the public good'. However, on issues such as the economic crisis there is consensus that citizens need objective information.
Berman (2011)	Classical political philosophy believes in the concept of 'common good' and that the citizenry should be committed to this.	The issue of self-interest brings into question the fundamental basis of the 'common good'. In the Saudi context, ideas of the public good are influenced by religious ideas.
Brock (2013)	PI entails a free flow of information, advances benefits or prevents harm towards society and the interests of a community to form a collective identity.	Who decides what is 'harmful' or 'beneficial'? In the KSA, figures with religious authority or members of the ruling family are arguably in a stronger position to make these decisions.

AUTHOR	KEY FEATURES OF PI	HOW THIS RELATES TO THE KSA
Happer & Philo (2013)	As a unifying factor, PI allows social change and it also acts as a legitimation of the way powerful individuals and institutions behave.	PI and important community issues are not always reflected by media regulations.
Morton & Aroney (2015)	Journalists' interpretation of PI is subjective especially in CJ but it can give a voice to those previously excluded from taking part in the public sphere and be an alternative to the "tabloidization and infotainment expressiveness and show".	In the KSA some people have no voice in the traditional media and so CJ performs this function with people turning to Twitter to get their voices can be heard.
Napoli (2015)	Professional journalism is supposedly guided by the PI and seeks to satisfy the perceived needs of their readership.	In the KSA, professional journalists are often not experts in fields such as economics and have to obey their editors-in-chief rather than serve the public.

3.9 Conclusion

Table 0.4 has highlighted challenges that face PICJ in the KSA. CJ and PI in western countries occur in a different context, i.e. a climate of democracy where media regulation supports CJ as a part of democracy. However, the Saudi traditional media is restricted by a series of factors that shape its content and limit freedom of expression. This is a major reason for the lack of investigative journalism in the Saudi traditional press. As a global platform, Twitter allows citizens to publish content that would normally be subject to red lines in the Saudi media. So it can be argued that the content of CJ helps to shape Saudi PI. This research will explore this journalistic practice and define how it works and how it is related to PI, using the insights gained to create a model of PICJ for economic issues in the KSA.

In order to fully understand the difficulties in establishing an independent journalism in the KSA, it is important to know the context in which journalism operates. Firstly, 'professionalism' in Saudi journalism is more a question of adhering to regulations rather than producing quality coverage of issues. To be a 'professional' journalist one must be a licensed member of the SJA, which requires a degree or media experience and to have been in full-time journalism for a minimum of one year. However, it is perfectly possible for someone to work as a journalist in any department of a publication and to have no relevant expertise or qualifications in the subjects they are writing about. Thus, the citizen journalists in the current study who are experts in the field of economics are more 'professional' than their counterparts in the traditional media in this respect. Secondly, it is difficult to practice independent PI journalism within a media that is ultimately controlled by the state and where it is almost impossible to publish coverage about issues considered taboo by the state or religious elites and where commercial interests (i.e. advertisers) and traditional values have a strong influence. Within this context it is clear that citizen journalists on Twitter exercise a degree of independence and have the necessary expertise to provide information and offer citizens the opportunity to ask questions and voice opinions on issues that fundamentally affect their lives, such as the financial crisis.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is intended to provide a clear and detailed description of the steps that have been taken to create and implement the research design for this study. It will make clear the rationale for the choice of research approach, and justify the use of the data collection tools and analytical methods which have been selected to achieve the aims and objectives of the research and to answer the research questions addressed by this study. In addition, it will outline the procedures used to ensure the quality of the data collected and their analysis and it will also highlight any ethical concerns raised by the research and clarify how these have been addressed.

4.2 Research Philosophy

It is important not only to describe how the research was conducted but also to make clear “what philosophical assumptions underpin the research” (Quinlan 2011: 177) because the methodology “emerges from the conceptual framework” (Quinlan 2011: 180). In the case of social sciences research, three research orientations are generally employed.

The first of these, positivistic research, seeks to generate results by exploring statistical relationships between dependent and independent variables for which it usually employs a quantitative methodology. The second, interpretivist research, is focused on social constructions of the world and tends to use qualitative methods with researchers and subjects working together to interpret reality (McEvoy and Richardson, 2006: 67) Finally, realism, as a research philosophy, can be said to be similar to positivism in that it accepts there is an external reality but it also posits that this can only be grasped through descriptions of particular instances. Therefore, realist research does not attempt to establish laws, as is often the case in the natural sciences, or to document unique cases. Instead, its aim is to explain phenomena, rather than predicting the occurrence of these, by formulating theories about the mechanisms that help to explain observable events. Typically, research that is

underpinned by the realist philosophy does not advocate the use of a specific set of methods for empirical research; rather, it encourages the use of those methods that are best suited to addressing the research questions to be answered (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

This research operates within the realist paradigm. It seeks to characterise and explain the workings of a phenomenon (PICJ in the KSA) rather than making predictions about it. It is argued that the information provided by this study's participants (Saudi citizen journalists, professional journalists, public figures and Tweeters) represents what these individuals have chosen to disclose and that this is shaped by their personal worldview, amongst many other factors. In this respect, then, it cannot be deemed to offer the objective truth. However, this research posits that there is an objective reality that generates this information.

A research methodology also typically reflects a particular form of reasoning, generally referred to as either inductive or deductive. While research that aims to test a theory relies on deductive reasoning, studies that are concerned with generating a new theory from the data that has been gathered use inductive reasoning. This study can be classified as being of the inductive type since it is attempting to provide and explain a model of PICJ in the KSA from empirical evidence gathered.

4.3 Aim of the Research and Research Questions

The aim of this research is to provide a better understanding of the manifestations of and relationships between the PI and CJ in the KSA.

This aim is to be achieved by addressing four research questions:

1. What are the factors that have led to the rise of CJ in the KSA?
2. In which ways does the public interest manifest itself in citizen journalism in the KSA?
3. What are the attitudes of Saudi citizens and professional journalists towards citizen journalism?
4. In which ways and to what extent does Twitter link the public interest and citizen journalism in the KSA?

4.4 Research Approach

In order to answer these research questions both objective factual information (such as Twitter analytics) and subjective information (such as the views of citizen journalists) is required. Some of this information can be acquired from the existing literature but a number of the current gaps in knowledge need to be filled by means of conducting empirical research. In view of the nature of the data that is required, it is argued that a pluralistic pragmatic research strategy is the most appropriate one to adopt in order to achieve the objectives of this study and answer its research questions. A pragmatic approach essentially entails adopting whichever research methods can be demonstrated to work best for addressing the issue under investigation. This approach is not rigidly tied to a particular philosophical paradigm and thus embraces the mixing of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis when this is found to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject being studied (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative and qualitative methods each have their own distinctive strengths and weaknesses and it is worth considering these in relation to the research questions to be answered in this study.

Quantitative methods are useful for dealing with large amounts of data, for example, the Twitter data analytics required to answer research question 4. Data collection of this type is relatively fast and largely independent of the researcher although the researcher establishes the categories used to analyse data and these may or may not adequately describe the complexity of the relationships existing between aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. However, quantitative methods alone would not be sufficient to elicit the detailed information which is specific to a particular context and required to fully address the other research questions (Johnson and Onwuebuze, 2004). Thematic analysis of content provides useful insights into the issues that users are interested in and the ways in which they choose to express that interest.

The methods employed as part of the qualitative approach allow the researcher to more easily access the categories of meaning established by study participants which are of central importance when approaching the research questions. Thus, this approach is best suited to understanding 'how' and 'why' questions. Qualitative methods help the researcher to explore a phenomenon which is embedded in a local context more thoroughly and collect

data about this in a relatively naturalistic setting. Thus, interviewing participant journalists in their own environment was thought to be more likely to elicit more revealing responses than, for example, a questionnaire survey delivered electronically (Creswell, 2013: 234).

However, qualitative research methods also have a number of disadvantages. The collection and analysis of qualitative data can be very time-consuming. Moreover, they lack the rigour possessed by detailed numerical and statistical measurements, and can be criticised for not providing mathematically based data (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research methods generate specific information that makes it difficult to carry out reliable comparisons with findings from previous studies, meaning they cannot be used for the purposes of generalization (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Given that qualitative methods are not based on standardised and numerically measurable procedures, this also means that results are highly dependent upon the personal interpretive skills of the researcher. If these are weak or insufficiently well developed, this could introduce flaws into the analysis and findings (Cho and Trent, 2006).

A mixed methods approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing their strengths to complement each other. Thus, for example, the perceptions of Saudi citizen journalists regarding the influence of Tweets on government economic policy gathered from interviews can provide new insights into the actual data generated by Twitter on specific dates and when these are analysed together, they may provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the links between CJ and PI.

This is not to say, of course, that the mixed methods approach does not have its weaknesses. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) acknowledge, this approach can pose challenges for researchers since they must develop expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, and they also need to understand how to combine them appropriately. Furthermore, the results from the different stages of the study may appear to be in conflict with each other and in need of being reconciled. For example, qualitative interview data from the first phase was not necessarily in agreement with the quantitative thematic analysis of Saudi tweets from the second phase. However, despite the potential challenges and difficulties posed by the mixed

methods approach, the decision has been made to adopt this approach for this study since combining the insights gained from collecting both quantitative and qualitative data will offer a more comprehensive view of the current situation regarding CJ in the Saudi context and facilitate a deeper understanding of the issues being investigated. Gathering data from multiple sources, including the opinions of Saudi media practitioners and tweets by ordinary citizens, provides a range of perspectives on the key issues addressed in this study.

4.5 Research Design

The nature of the research questions addressed by this study suggests that a multi-phase investigation is needed in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. These research questions are intrinsically linked to the conceptual framework for the study which consists of three key concepts.

The first of these is Saudi CJ and in order to map this concept it is necessary to establish how this phenomenon emerged; the ways in which it differs from the Western understanding of CJ; and which types of Saudi citizen journalists exist and why.

Exploring the second concept, PI, will involve establishing the role that Saudi CJ plays in shaping the content of Saudi PI. In this case, the specific focus will be on understanding how and why socio-economic issues, specifically the 2014 oil crisis, have become a matter of PI in Saudi society and the central focus of Saudi CJ. This exploration will be underpinned by evidence from interviews and Twitter data analysis, to establish the elements that create PICJ in the KSA.

The third concept, Twitter in the KSA, involves explaining how and why Twitter has been used to facilitate direct interaction between Saudi citizens and journalists on issues relating to the Saudi economy. Additionally, there will be a focus on establishing the links between PI and CJ and how this has created a new journalistic system that produces economic news and updates that are trusted.

The research design chosen for the empirical part of this study is a sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2013) consisting of two phases.

Phase one involved the use of qualitative methods to collect and analyse data from semi-structured interviews with a sample of Saudi citizen journalists and professional journalists with a specific interest in reporting on economic affairs. Phase two entails carrying out a thematic analysis on a sample of Saudi tweets that focused on economic affairs and that were trending in the KSA during the period 2015-2016. The researcher then used a quantitative method that is based on numerical data and establishes the size of the themes in each hashtag. A detailed description of the data collection techniques and data analysis methods used in each phase of the study, together with a justification for their use is provided in the following sections.

Using this two-stage sequential design and adopting a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis ensures that information that might not be captured in one phase will be gathered at another, and this is more likely to produce the findings necessary to address the research questions fully. For example, information gathered from journalists in interview is limited to the views of thirty individuals, whereas the analysis of Twitter hashtags (total sample of 10,346 tweets across all selected hashtags) provides access to the views of a much larger and more heterogeneous group. Thus, beginning with semi-structured interviews with both professional and citizen journalists focusing on CJ in the KSA provides detailed data that can be used to map this concept, which is an important step when the detail of a relatively new activity is being studied (Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2007).

However, these data do not furnish the researcher with the means to fully explore the nature and functioning of CJ in the KSA. For this reason, a quantitative approach, such as descriptive statistics, can be used to understand the impact of particular hashtags more precisely by calculating tweeting rates (i.e. the frequency of tweets for each theme in the hashtags). Twitter analysis generates quantitative data that offers the benefits of quantification, precision, and reliability when establishing trends and comparing data. This is complemented by the qualitative data from the first-phase interviews to allow the researcher to acquire a more detailed and holistic understanding of the manifestations of and relationships between the PI and CJ in the KSA.

Given that Twitter data constitutes a major feature of this research it is useful to briefly outline here the reasons for the choice for focusing on this SM

platform. First and foremost, Twitter is one of the most frequently used SM platforms in the KSA and has been acknowledged to be the most influential network affecting Saudi public opinion (Al Rashid, 2016: 195). It also has content that is readily available for research. It is regularly updated and interactional, allowing it to be used to track responses to external events such as Royal Decrees, and enables sharing and access to multimedia information that can provide content and additional insights into the issues being investigated in this study. The ability to follow organisations or individuals generating news and information provides researchers with direct access to content, making their research more immediate. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the platform means information is constantly renewed and reflective of current concerns. The interest in Twitter as an SM platform in the KSA began in 2015 when Saudis started sharing videos that they had uploaded for the purpose of exposing civil servants behaving badly. When developing this methodology, close attention was paid to previous studies that had focused on the use of Twitter in the KSA and its neighbouring Arab states in the past five years and Twitter's regional influence between late 2010 and early 2011, especially following the Arab Spring (Siddiqui, 2014; Dubai School of Government, 2011).

To answer the research questions outlined in see Chapter 1, Section 1.3, the researcher gathered data with a variety of methods. The thematic analysis of Saudi tweets addressed Research Question 2 (In which ways does the public interest manifest itself in citizen journalism in the KSA?) and 4 (In which ways and to what extent does Twitter link the public interest and citizen journalism in the KSA?), for which a quantitative approach was taken and tweets in each hashtag were counted. Research Question 4 was also answered with data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, as were research Questions 1 (What are the factors that led to the rise of CJ in the KSA?) and 3 (What are the attitudes of Saudi citizens and professional journalists towards citizen journalism?).

4.6 Data Collection Phase 1: Interviews

The first phase of the study involved using semi-structured interviews to collect data from the participants. With semi-structured interviews, the researcher is

able to control the questioning, the pace, and the direction of the conversation and ensure that all participants answer a specific set of questions but, at the same time, interviewees have the opportunity to talk about issues that are important to them and the researcher can ask unplanned questions, introducing flexibility into the discussion (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2008: 102). This can be useful for attaining a more nuanced and much broader understanding of the issues at stake, especially if the respondent mentions topics or relevant views that were unexpected or not previously considered by the researcher. These topics and views can then be explored rather than being ignored, thereby adding detail and depth to the research (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2008).

Although interviews provide rich and detailed information, analysis of these can prove time-consuming. It is also an intrusive method, since it requires the respondents to provide information that is derived from personal experience and may be sensitive, and this may be problematic given the conservative nature of the Saudi population (Alghamdy, 2011). Consequently, it is important for the researcher to develop trust with potential interviewees, and ensure that their consent is properly informed so that they are willing to participate in the study and provide quality information.

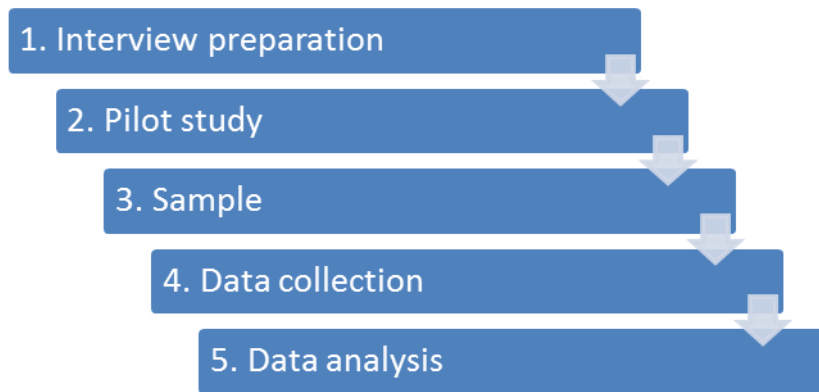
Table 0.1 Range of interview skills and qualities required by researchers (Yin, 2011)

SKILLS & QUALITIES REQUIRED	PURPOSE
Listening	To engage effectively and contribute successfully to the conversation
Understanding	To continuously show interest and understanding in order to correctly interpret responses and ask further questions to avoid any misinterpretation.
Adaptability	To have a degree of flexibility with respect to handling unaccepted responses or events and altering the interview strategy accordingly in order to maintain research subject satisfaction and contribution
Inquiring mind	To ask questions during the interview in a 'two-way conversation' style
Unbiased	To correctly interpret responses obtained.

Interviews are, in effect, conversations; and in order to generate useful data it is crucial to be able to create a natural flow of dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee. As Yin (2011) notes, in order to maximize the chances of obtaining successful outcomes from interviews, the researcher needs to develop a wide range of skills, as illustrated in Table 4.1.

According to McNamara (1999) to ensure that interviews prove successful, the researcher needs to follow five distinct stages as shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 0.1: The interview process (adapted from McNamara, 1999)



These stages were followed in this study and are described in detail in the following sections.

4.6.1 Interview Preparation

This stage involves developing the questions to be used for data collection. A first draft of the interview questions was prepared, ensuring that these were directly related to the research questions. Two versions of the questions were produced, one in English and the other in Arabic, the language in which the interviews were to take place as this was the first language of both the researcher and interviewees. Feedback was then sought on the English version of the interview questions from the researcher's supervisor.

The Arabic version of the questions was sent via email to two Arabic-speaking doctoral research students and seven academics with expertise in media and mass communication including five who are based in the KSA, together with one journalist working in economic affairs (see Pilot Study Participants Appendix I).)The respondents were asked to focus firstly on the clarity and comprehensibility of the wording of the questions and secondly, their logical flow. They were also asked for any further comments on how these could be improved.

Feedback from all respondents was read and incorporated into the second revised version of the questions. As a result of the feedback, the order of interview questions was changed, some questions were reworded to improve

clarity and some were replaced by new ones. These revised questions were then further tested in the pilot study.

4.6.2 Pilot study

Conducting a pilot study is a useful means of identifying and correcting any remaining problems with the interview questions. It also provides the researcher with useful practice at fielding questions and allows data collection procedures to be refined as it indicates how long the interviews are likely to take which is essential to know when setting up an interview schedule (McNamara, 1999). These pilot interviews were carried out by telephone with three volunteers from the group of experts who provided feedback on the process.

4.6.3 Sample

Sampling is a necessary step in terms of choosing which individuals will be interviewed, since it is rarely practical to study whole populations in any research (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, being able to demonstrate that sampling decisions have been well-thought out is a crucial aspect of a study's rigour (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The final selection of interviewees is outlined below.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. This is a selective non-probability sampling process method which intentionally attempts to obtain representative samples, and is generally used in qualitative research (Bazeley, 2013). Unlike quantitative studies which need to reach a specified numerical quota in order to ensure statistical significance for their samples, there is no recognized minimum number of participants for a qualitative study. In addition, with regard to the chosen data analysis method, thematic analysis, the researcher him/herself must judge when there are enough data to adequately answer the research questions (sometimes referred to as saturation point) and additional participants will be unlikely to contribute new information (Hartley, 2004). In practical terms, longer interviews tend to generate more data meaning that fewer may be needed (Wilmot, 2005). However, the chosen sample must be sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the research.

To be included in this study, the interviewees had to meet the following two criteria:

1. They must be currently residing in the KSA;
2. They must actively use Twitter as a platform for posting news on economic affairs.

For preference, study participants would have been involved in reporting the economic crisis in the KSA caused by the drop in oil prices. In addition, it was also important to select interviewees who belonged to one of the following categories:

- Professional journalists employed by a Saudi-based newspaper;²⁷
- Authorised journalists (columnists in economic papers, and actively posting on Twitter about economic issues);
- High-profile Twitter users (public figures) without any recognised status as journalists, and who have many followers.

Furthermore, an attempt was also made to acknowledge the regional diversity of the KSA by ensuring that the chosen sample of interviewees were not all based in the capital city and that the publications that journalists worked for also reflected a geographical spread. This was important as there may potentially be quite distinct perspectives across the KSA's five regions. Table 4.2 provides a description of the three groups of participants from which the sample was taken and the reason for their inclusion.

Table 0.2: The three groups of interviewees selected for this study

GROUP	DESCRIPTION AND RATIONALE FOR SELECTION
Authorised Journalists (Columnists)	Any Saudi national can gain authorisation from the MoCI to practise as a free-lance journalist if she or he is active online and posts news using any online platform. These freelance journalists specialise in economic affairs and are as well-known and popular among Saudis as columnists in the traditional press. Data from these interviewees will enable the researcher to judge the degree of awareness of citizen journalists concerning the principles of journalism (e.g. their perceptions of objectivity and factual accuracy) and the extent to which they apply such journalistic principles, particularly in relation to decision-making about reporting on sensitive materials and topics. They are mainly active on Twitter.

²⁷The Saudi Council of Minister's issued an order on 22/05/2012 requiring anyone engaging in journalism to be authorised by the SJA.

Public Figures on Twitter	Members of this group were restricted to those who post on ‘hot issues’ such as controversial economic subjects, are well-known and popular among Saudis, and have a large number of followers. Data from these participants will enable the researcher to highlight the different types of reports that citizen journalists in the KSA cover, their identities, affiliations and role in media coverage in the region.
Professional Journalists	These individuals are members of the Saudi Journalists Association (SJA) and employed by Saudi newspapers to report on economic affairs. Data from these participants will enable the researcher to ascertain the attitude of professional journalists towards citizen journalists. All the professional journalists in the sample of interviewees work for newspapers that produce both paper-based and digital editions. They are reporters on economic affairs and editors for <i>Al-Yaum</i> , <i>Al-Watan</i> , and <i>Al-Eqtisadiyah</i> .

The Secretary-General of the SJA, Dr Abdallah Aljahlan, was contacted via email for help in recruiting potential participants for the study, and he also offered to provide office space where interviews could be held. In 2015, there were 920 registered members of SJA and the majority of these work in seven newspapers: *Al-Riyadh* [Riyadh], *Al-Jazirah* [the Arabian Peninsula], *Okaz* (which takes its name from one of the largest open-air markets in pre-Islamic times), *Al-Yaum* [Today], *Al-Eqtisadiyah* [The Economy], *Al-Watan* [Homeland] and *Makkah* [Mecca] (Aljahlan, personal correspondence). A request was sent to the Saudi MoCI requesting information on the number of authorised journalists in 2015; to date, no response has been received.

All the professional journalists in the sample of interviewees work for newspapers that produce both paper-based and digital editions. Three of these (*Al-Riyadh*, *Al-Jazirah*, and *Al-Eqtisadiyah*) are based in the Saudi capital. *Al-Eqtisadiyah* is the only one of the seven publications that specialises in business, finance, and economic affairs. *Okaz* and *Al-Yaum* were established in the 1960s, while *Al-Watan* is the most recent of the publications in the sample to employ professional journalists. All of these outlets (with the possible exception of *Al-Eqtisadiyah*) combine local and regional coverage with a high level of outreach, and all can be considered to exercise a significant influence on the media landscape in the KSA. One of the authorized journalists writes a column on economic affairs, which is published in *Makkah*, a Mecca-based newspaper that was launched in 2014. In the KSA, direct and indirect censorship is implemented by the MoCI (Ministry of Culture and Information), the Mol (Ministry of the Interior), and the CITC (Communications and Information

Technology Commission) (ADHRB, 2015). As a result, the traditional media, and especially the press, adheres to the official line laid down by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), which is government-run (*ibid*, p.6). Specifically, the limits imposed on journalists and publications are ultimately decided by the Minister of Culture and Information, and infringements are frequently penalised. The traditional media firstly censors any material prior to publication, in order to ensure that Saudis cannot access anything that the State deems unsuitable; the legal framework that enables this is vague and wide-ranging, meaning that any dissenting voice can easily be silenced (Harrison, 2016). Details about all these publications are provided in Table 0.3. For more details on the media system in the KSA, see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.

Table 0.3: Details of Saudi publications where interviewees are employed or publish work as freelance columnists

NEWSPAPER	LOCATION (REGION)	FOUNDED	FORMAT/PLATFORMS	CIRCULATION	STAFF COVERING ECONOMIC AFFAIRS	COVERAGE OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS	
						DAILY	OTHER DETAILS
<i>Al-Eqtisadiyah</i>	Riyadh (Central)	1992	paper (broadsheet), website, Twitter	76,928	32	YES	A specialist publication focusing on business, finance and economics.
<i>Al-Jazirah</i>	Riyadh	1997	paper (broadsheet), website, Twitter	131,021	7	YES	
<i>Al-Riyadh</i>	Riyadh	1963	paper (broadsheet), website, Twitter	170,000	10	YES	Also publishes <i>Economic World</i> magazine monthly
<i>Al-Watan</i>	Abha (Southern)	2000	paper (broadsheet), website, Twitter	35,000	6	YES	
<i>Al-Yaum</i>	Dammam (Eastern)	1965	paper (broadsheet), website, Twitter	34,000	30	YES	
<i>Okaz</i>	Jeddah (Western)	1966	paper (broadsheet), website, Twitter	107,614	4	YES	
<i>Makkah</i>	Mecca (Western)	2014	paper (broadsheet), website, Twitter	No data available	0	Yes	

4.6.4 Data Collection

Once the sample had been selected, participants were contacted by email prior to interview and provided with detailed information about the study and the interview and were asked to arrange a convenient appointment time to meet with the researcher. Ethical approval for the research from the university was also gained prior to travelling to the KSA to conduct the interviews (see Appendix 13). The interviews were held in the period 25 December 2016 to 12 January 2017 (see Appendix for details of interviews with participants).²⁸

Table 0.4: Data collection schedule

DATE	INTERVIEW
WEEK 1: 25-29/12/2016	Interviews with professional journalists from <i>Al-Riyadh</i> , <i>Al-Jazirah</i> and <i>Al-Eqtisadieh</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interview professional journalists from each news organization who write in economic news section. ○ Interview duration will be 60 minutes for each journalist. ○ Interview 3 authorized journalists
WEEK 2: 1-4/01/2017	Interviews with professional journalists from <i>Okaz</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interview professional journalists from each news organization who write in economic news section. ○ Interview duration will be 60 minutes for each journalist and columnist. ○ Interview 3 authorized journalists
WEEK 3: 5-10/01/2017	Interviews with professional journalists from <i>Al-Yaum</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interview professional journalists from each news organization who write in economic news section. ○ Interview duration will be 60 minutes for each journalist and columnist. ○ Interview 1 authorized journalist
WEEK 4: 11-12/01/2017	Interviews with professional journalists from <i>Al-Watan</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interview professional journalists from each news organization who write in economic news section. ○ Interview duration will be 60 minutes for each journalist and columnist. ○ Interview 3 authorized journalists
31/12/2016 7/01/2017 14/01/2017	Interviews with 5 public figures in economic news that do not have a license or an authorization from the Saudi Minister of Culture and Information.

²⁸Since the KSA is an Islamic country, there are no significant holiday breaks during this period.

Most interviews were conducted in person (face-to-face) and took place in a range of settings as appropriate. Professional journalists were interviewed in their respective workplaces in Riyadh, Dammam and Jeddah while most of the other interviews were held in offices in the SJA building in Riyadh. Professional journalists working for *Al-Watan*, which is based in Abha, were all interviewed by telephone due to the difficulties posed by the ongoing conflict with Yemen in the Southern Region of the KSA.

At the start of proceedings, after a brief personal introduction, interviewees were briefed on the purpose of the interview and reminded about the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also assured that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained and that their information would only be used for the research study. Interviewees were then asked to sign an Arabic version of the consent form as this was their first language. All interviewees, whether interviewed face-to-face or by telephone, also gave permission for their interview to be audio-recorded.

Interviews were used to gain an insight into the nature and practices of PICJ focused on economic affairs in the KSA and to obtain a general impression of interviewees' personal opinions on and perceptions of CJ in the Saudi context. Some questions were common to all three groups while others were group specific (see Appendix for interview questions for pilot study). All interviews were conducted in Arabic, the first language of both researcher and interviewees. Most of the interviews lasted for 90 minutes, the shortest being 60 minutes and the longest two hours. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time. The researcher transcribed the interviews as soon as possible after they had taken place and then translated them from Arabic into English, ready for thematic analysis (see Chapter 6).

4.7 Data Collection Phase Two

The second phase focused on selected economic themes, especially developmental economics which tend to trend on Twitter hashtags in the KSA. The researcher analysed these hashtags manually by using thematic analysis (see Chapter 6). The approach taken by the researcher in coding

the interview data can be described as a deductive/top-down thematic analysis in which the researcher's interest in a particular area is what drives the analysis. Although this may provide a less rich description of the data overall, it can allow a more detailed focus on those aspects of the data deemed most relevant to the research. After analysing the Twitter data by thematic analysis, the size of the themes found in each hashtag was calculated. The number of tweets for each theme was counted and then each of these themes was calculated as a percentage of the whole number in the sample to determine the relative importance of each theme. These percentages were then represented graphically.

4.8 Data Analysis Phase One: Interviews

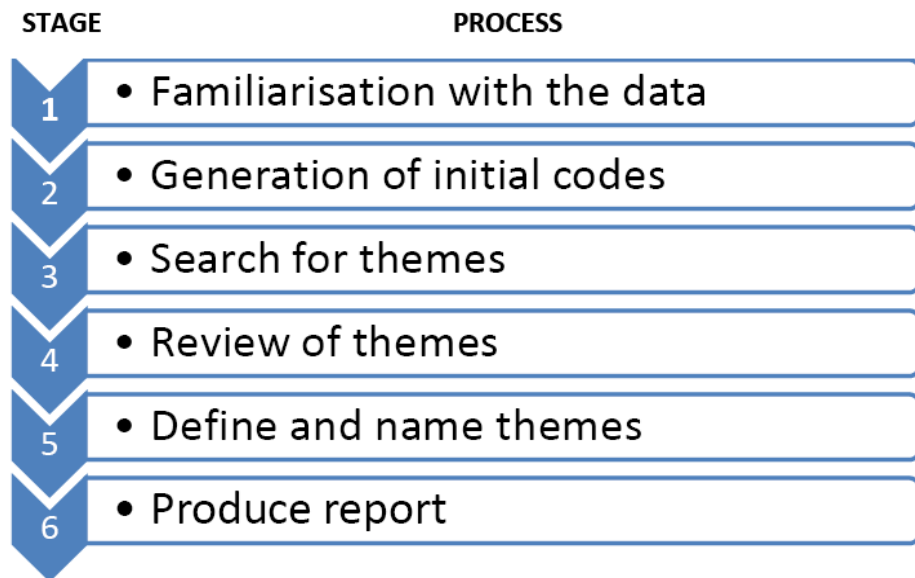
This section will provide an overview of the benefits of thematic analysis as an approach and then a discussion will demonstrate how the data generated from the interviews was coded prior to being placed into initial themes. It will also explain in detail how these initial themes were refined into a reduced number of main themes. These main themes, together with their sub-themes, represent the final stage of thematic mapping for this thesis and they are discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Thematic analysis allows the researcher to organise data gathered from interviews in such a way that patterns (or themes) can be identified and analysed within the narratives that contain the experiences of the interviewees (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method of analysis was chosen because it has the following advantages of particular relevance to this study:

- Its rigorous application can generate detailed insight in order to answer the research questions.
- Its flexible approach may be used with a variety of different epistemologies.
- It can describe and summarise important aspects from a large quantity of data.
- Attention can be drawn to those parts of the data where there are significant similarities or differences.
- Insights that were not anticipated may be generated (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

There is no consensus among the academic community concerning how thematic analysis should be carried out in practice (Bazeley, 2013). The analysis of the interview data followed the six distinct stages of thematic analysis identified by Braun and Clarke (2006), as illustrated in Figure 4.2

Figure 0.2: Stages of thematic analysis (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006)



The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit data relating to the four research questions that the study addresses:

- **Question One** was intended to identify participants' understanding of the meaning and function of CJ. Responses to this question will help the researcher to map out how CJ is conceptualized in the KSA and to determine the extent to which this differs from concepts of CJ as defined in Western literature. Responses will also help to define the role, factors, and nature of the influence that citizen journalists have had and currently have in the KSA and in the wider region.
- **Question Two** focused on exploring the PI element of CJ in the Saudi context and was intended to provide the basis of an explanatory model of PICJ in the KSA.
- **Question Three** was designed to provide detailed insights into the attitudes of Saudi professional and non-professional journalists towards CJ.

- **Question Four** was concerned with determining the roles played specifically by Twitter in articulating and developing CJ in the KSA (see Appendix for interview questions).

The themes of this analysis did not 'emerge' passively but rather the researcher played an active role in the identification of patterns/themes that were of interest and relevance to the focus dictated by the research questions.

With regard to the actual steps taken during the process of thematic analysis, it could be argued that effectively this began during the interview process, since the researcher began to notice potential patterns of meaning, as well as issues of relevance and interest at that early stage, and jotted down some initial keywords and possible coding schemes. However, it was not until the transcription of all the interviews was completed that familiarisation with the data firmly got under way. This involved repeatedly reading through transcripts of the audio-recordings in order to identify meanings and patterns. When this familiarization was complete, it was possible to commence the formal coding process. This entailed identifying interesting features of the interview data and generating a code for these. The code is simply a single word or very short phrase used for the purposes of labelling (Saldana, 2012). These data extracts were then sorted into meaningful coded groups.

It is possible to use computer programmes such as NVIVO to help with thematic mapping. However, this is still not able to cope with Arabic script and therefore this would have meant either transliterating all the Arabic into Roman script or translating all of the initial data into English, either of which would have been extremely time-consuming processes. Therefore, a manual approach was adopted which involved writing the name of each code along with a brief description/definition on a separate piece of paper. These pieces of paper were then organised into piles of initial themes that suggested patterns or similar meanings, to produce the initial thematic map (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It should be noted that the researcher sometimes created an initial theme for a single data extract if this was regarded as

being of significant interest. This approach was applied even if this did not necessarily appear to fit neatly with other categories that were appearing.

As Braun and Clarke (2006: 10) explain: “The ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question”. Thus when deciding what would justify a pattern/theme before initiating coding, the decision was made that this should not be necessarily be governed by the frequency that a specific topic was mentioned but rather judged on its degree of its significance to a research question, even if a particular data item occurred only once.

Then, bearing in mind the research questions and the aims of the study, the researcher eliminated those initial themes that did not seem relevant or combined themes to arrive at a reduced number of relevant main themes. This process of refinement (thematic mapping) was then repeated until a small number of main themes had been identified, along with sub-themes relating to them. This represented the final thematic map (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Diagrams of the thematic maps, together with the final main themes and their sub-themes, are presented and discussed in a later chapter of this thesis (see Chapter 5).

This approach can also be categorized as semantic since there was no attempt made to look for anything beyond what each interviewee actually said during the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process of analysis thus progressed from data description towards data organisation on the basis of semantic content (i.e. meaning). These semantic themes were then summarised prior to a later phase (described in detail in 0) in which the broader implications of these themes gathered from the meanings, experiences and motivations of the interviewees were linked to theoretical frameworks in a manner that was relatively straightforward (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4.9 Data Analysis Phase Two

The second phase involves analysing Twitter data manually using thematic analysis. Publicly available data from Twitter’s free Application Program

Interface (API) allowed the tracking of the adoption of hashtags relating to changes in economic policies that were trending in the KSA during the period 2015-16. Due to the huge amount of Twitter data for each hashtag, the researcher systematically selected a 10% sample of each dataset to ensure this was reasonably representative. A systematic random sample of tweets was selected using Microsoft Excel. More specifically, Microsoft Excel's "=rand()" feature was used to create a random number column, such that each tweet was assigned a random number. Subsequently, a sample of 10% of the total number of tweets was selected. The software used clustered the data by content, and subsequently the researcher cleaned the data by manually extracting content not considered relevant to the hashtag issues. Next, each tweet in the hashtag sample was given an identifier to facilitate thematic analysis. Given that the language used in the tweet sample from these hashtags was mainly Arabic, thematic analysis was conducted manually. This process is explained in more detail in a later chapter of this thesis (see Chapter 6).

The hashtags sampled were:

- #Economic Reform Issues (Royal_Decrees_ 2015) (29/1/2015)
- #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed (23/11/2015)
- #Saudi_Vision_2030 (25/4/2016)
- #Royal_Decrees 2016 (27/09/2016)

All hashtags trended after an official announcement from the State (Royal Decrees – official economic decision). Each hashtag was analysed individually using a thematic analysis to explore the extent to which Twitter generated Saudi PI in CJ; common themes were then linked together.

Since it is useful to provide the context for these hashtags, detailed explanations are provided in the footnotes provided. Briefly, one week after King Salman came to power in January 2015, starting on 29 January 2015, the new monarch began to issue a series of economic decisions that would ultimately change the Saudi economy, and the approach to some of the most key socio-economic issues affecting Saudi citizens (Abedallah, 2016).

Though possibly difficult to comprehend in a Western context, for Saudi citizens, White Lands tax represented the first time they had

encountered the concept of taxation. As a result of the plan entitled *Vision 2030*,²⁹ legislation and policies were enacted to ensure national economic recovery and long-term prosperity. These covered many issues affecting Saudi citizens (see 0). Despite their importance, *Vision 2030* did not address them directly for two reasons according to Aljoumiah (2017). Firstly, because *Vision 2030* would involve more fundamental reform of the Saudi economy and secondly, because they will be dealt with if the larger reform is made to work.

With regard to the #Royal_Decrees hashtag, most of the Royal Decrees issued in 2015 and 2016 were related to economic reforms in the KSA. This was due to the reduction of the KSA's revenues as a result of the fall of oil prices by more than 50% since 2014. The KSA is the world's largest oil producer and, consequently, it recorded a budget deficit of \$98 billion in 2015 (*Al-Jazeera*, 2015) which reduced government spending and badly affected the living standards of Saudi citizens.

The Saudi government issued a number of Royal Decrees that related to cancelling, freezing or changing some of the allowances, bonuses and financial benefits paid to state employees, including overtime rates. Annual allowances for 2017 were also cancelled, as well as any extra payment for renewal, extension or continuation of contracts or for re-contracting. The prices of fuel, water and electricity were also increased. These reforms were intended to relieve pressure on the general budget and encourage efficient use of energy due to the fall in oil prices. Before the changes, the prices of fuel, water and electricity in the KSA were among the lowest internationally as they were heavily subsidised by the government. Estimates indicate that subsidising fuel prices cost the Saudi government approximately \$61 million in 2015 or 9.3% of its GDP. Even now, utility prices remain low compared to regional and international rates.

²⁹ The *Vision 2030* plan set out three strategic objectives for the future of the KSA, the second of which was 'To become a leading investment power'. The plan promised economic reform as part of this objective and laid out a complete framework designed to increase efficiency and facilitate coordination of efforts among Ministries and government institutions. The 2020 National Transformation Program and the Fiscal Balance Programme were also announced.

In order to realize the study objectives and address the research questions, the researcher divided the Twitter study sample into themes and determined the number of tweets in each theme. This was then calculated as a percentage of the total number of tweets to determine the relative importance of each theme.

A number of difficulties emerged with the original analysis plan which meant a different approach to analyzing Twitter had to be adopted. The original intention was to use NodeXL Pro Software to analyse Twitter data relating to specific dates in 2015 and 2016. However, like most of the software that can be used to analyse data from social networks like Twitter, NodeXL Pro Software can only deal with recent—and not historical—data. An online search revealed that it is possible to use TweetDeck and Twitter's 'Advanced Search' option to search for historical tweets by creating a new data accurate account in Twitter which is not affected by followers and following. However, these data are displayed as a webpage on the Internet and NodeXL Pro Software requires data input in the format of Excel files.

Various attempts were made to resolve these problems with generating historical Twitter data. Dr. Dron Richard, a lecturer at the University of Salford Business School, who uses NodeXL software, helped the researcher to contact Marc Smith, the Canada-based founder of NodeXL Software. Smith confirmed by Skype that this type of data must be purchased but it is very expensive and he suggested shifting the time frame for the research which would have been difficult.

Wasim Ahmed, an expert in social network analysis based in the School of Informatics at Sheffield University suggested that data could be generated using Sifter (<https://sifter.texifter.com/>) but this is not available free of charge. The quote from Sifter software for all the hashtags covered by this study was \$440. Ahmed also suggested another software called Discovertext which can deal with Arabic text. However, this cannot analyse engagement and interaction within a hashtag, only the individual tweets.

Twitter was then emailed directly by the researcher, asking for its assistance with this research. The reply said that it was possible to have access to historical data but it was necessary to complete a 'Twitter Approval

Form' and submit an historical Twitter data estimate for each date required. These were been submitted and a response was received giving a cost of 1,250 USD, clearly too expensive given the very limited resources available to this researcher.

In order to solve the problem of working with historical Twitter data, the researcher used Sifter³⁰, rather than Search API, to import data. The data was subsequently imported into Excel format to select a systematic sample of 10% of the total number of tweets. The researcher had to move the data from Sifter, which imported historical data, to Discovertext, which gathered all data into Excel format. Following this, the thematic analysis could be undertaken manually.

4.10 Reliability and Validity

4.10.1 Qualitative Analysis

The reliability of qualitative investigation is established by what is termed 'auditability', in other words, ensuring that the collection, processing and analysis of data is done consistently (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). This means that all the procedures carried out in the qualitative phases of the study i.e. qualitative thematic analysis of tweets in the sample hashtags and interview data in the case of this research, could be replicated by another researcher - or at another time - reliably and that there was consistency in the way the analyses were conducted. In the interviews, this consistency also relies in part on the skills of the researcher who is conducting the interviews (Appleton, 1995); therefore the interview schedule had to be carefully designed and any difficulties, such as what to do about interruptions, catered for beforehand. The researcher made sure all the questions were understood and that there was consistency in how the interviews were carried out in terms of number of questions asked and time allocated for these. The qualitative thematic analysis of tweets also followed a consistent

³⁰ Search API yields a random sample of tweets of approximately 1% for popular topics, whereas Sifter uses the Firehose API, which comprises 100% of the data.

approach for each hashtag in terms of how the information was recorded and coded (see Chapter 6 for detailed explanation).

In this study it was essential that the opinions of participants and the descriptions and interpretations of their experiences and tweets were properly understood as those participants intended. The researcher tried to be as impartial as possible when analysing the data in order to reveal CJ in the KSA through the voices of those actually involved and to hear citizen's voices through the freedom of expression afforded by Twitter. Achieving this would mean that the qualitative results were credible and thus have an internal validity.

The researcher paid attention to clarifying what was said by interviewees from different parts of the KSA with regional dialects and attempted to fully understand participants' viewpoints by asking interviewees to define their concepts when appropriate, especially columnists who used economic terminology. It was also important to make sure that the findings could be sensibly applied to other participants in the same target population of columnists, public figures and professional journalists in similar contexts to that of the current study. This would ensure that the findings had 'fittingness' which is similar to what is described as 'external validity' in quantitative studies (Appleton, 1995).

Interviewer bias on the part of the researcher can negatively affect the validity of the study as it can affect how the interviewee responds (Saunders *et al*, 2009). For this reason every effort was made to ensure that the interviewer remained interested but neutral about what the interviewees said and reminded participants that their confidentiality would be maintained.

4.10.2 Quantitative Analysis

In order for a study to be considered to have reliability, the results should be able to be replicated and the sample chosen should be deemed to be representative of the target population. Validity, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the research instrument measures what it was intended to measure (Simon, 2011).

The research instrument chosen to collect data needs to be consistent in the way it collects those data and that data needs to be consistently analysed. A reliable instrument will generate the same results if employed on a separate occasion, and there has to be transparency in the way that this data have been used to produce results and make conclusions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The researcher imported historical data by buying data via the Sifter³¹ website. First a request was sent for Twitter data that showed the date for each hashtag then data became available on Discover text. As this system provides real-time access to the stream of tweets and performs advanced text analytics to search, filter, code, and machine-classify the data, the researcher could be reasonably certain that data had been collected accurately and consistently and that none had been omitted. After this procedure, thematic analysis could be carried out manually on the selected sample. This manual procedure was used as tweets were in Arabic and sometimes in local dialect.

A research instrument is considered valid if it measures what it is intended to measure. In order to achieve this, each theme was allocated key words that would normally appear in those specific economic issues; for example, the white lands fees hashtag contained key words such as 'housing crisis', 'white lands tax', 'real estate' and so on. The researcher was thus able to eliminate 'messy' tweets that did not include relevant content for each hashtag. Furthermore, as the tweets were collected at peak trending times a wider range of viewpoints could be gathered. The Twitter data is shown in the Appendices.

4.11 Ethical Issues

Ethical approval for all aspects of this study was obtained from the University Ethics Committee prior to beginning fieldwork in the KSA.

All potential recruits for the interviews were initially briefed by email in their first language about the nature of the study and were fully informed about what their participation as interviewees would involve. It was also

³¹ Sifter is able to extract historical data from Twitter at a reasonable cost.

made clear that participation was voluntary and that interviewees were free to withdraw at any point of the study. A consent form in was provided to interviewees along with an information sheet that explained the purpose of the research in clear, non-specialist language and guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of their data.

Immediately before the interview, participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw at any stage and that any data would be used solely for the purposes of the study. Interviewees were also asked to give their permission to an audio-recording being made of the session.

In order to protect the identity of participants (unless they specifically requested that they were named), they were anonymised by an alphanumeric identifier which was used for citing quotes. Any information relating to names and contact details of individuals recruited for the study was stored securely and kept separately.

Any devices used to make the digital recordings were protected by security applications together with passwords. Recorded data from interviews was downloaded to a password-protected folder on a password-protected hard drive. All these recordings will be deleted following completion of the research. All transcriptions, translations and copies were treated in a similar fashion.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter describes the research design for this thesis and explains the rationale for the choice of a multi-phase design which employs a mixed methodology combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. The methods of collecting, processing and analysing data gathered from semi-structured interviews and Twitter data were also described. The chapter concludes by considering the reliability and validity of these research methods together with any relevant ethical issues raised by this investigation. The findings from the interview analysis are presented and discussed in Chapter 5. Analysis of the Twitter data follows in Chapter 6.

Chapter Five: Citizen Journalism and Twitter in Saudi Arabia: Dissemination, Democratisation, Disinformation

5.1 Introduction

The sample from which the interview data is drawn focuses on authorised Saudi columnists, public figures on Twitter, and professional journalists. Saudi columnists gain authorisation from the MoCI if they are active online and post news using any online platform and adhere to the Anti-Cyber Crime Law. Professional Saudi journalists are members of the Saudi Journalists Association (SJA). Their SJA membership is renewed annually and is only available to full-time journalists who must have a degree or media experience. SJA membership serves as a licence to practise journalism in the KSA and it has become an essential document for journalists in the KSA from 2012 onward in an attempt to limit the distribution of both online and offline news to 'credible' sources only. Finally, in this analysis public figures on Twitter are restricted to those who post on hotly debated economic issues, and who are known and popular among Saudis.

5.2 Profile of interviewees

5.2.1 Freelance Economic Affairs Columnists for the Saudi Press Considered Influential on Twitter

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with 10 individuals who act as economic affairs columnists for the Saudi press, all of them authorised by the Saudi MoCI (see Table 0.1). Newspapers pay for the articles written by freelance columnists. These interviewees are identified as Colm1-10 respectively. All of them are also active on SM networks, posting on economic affairs. All 10 used Twitter, with only two of these also using Snapchat (Colm4 and Colm5). Each interviewee in the sample was asked the same set of 16 questions and further questions were added if an individual's responses merited further probing.

Table 0.1: Economic affairs columnists considered influential on Twitter

ID	GENDER	AGE	LENGTH OF TIME AS CJ	REGION OF DOMICILE	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	LENGTH OF INTERVIEW	EXPERIENCE AS ECONOMIC AFFAIRS COLUMNIST IN SAUDI PRESS	CJ PLATFORM	NEWSPAPER FOR WHICH COLUMNIST WRITES	NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS ON 8/02/17	VERIFIED ACCOUNT
Colm1	Male	50	5 years	Al-Riyadh	BA in Economics	2 hours	13 years	Twitter	<i>Al Eqtisadiyah</i>	741K	Yes
Colm2	Male	50	5 years	Eastern Area	MA in Financial Management	90 minutes	14 years	Twitter	<i>Al-Jazeera</i>	27.7K	Yes
Colm3 ^a	Male	50	7 years	Al-Riyadh	MA in Economics	90 minutes	20 years	Twitter	<i>Al-Riyadh</i>	348K	Yes
Colm4	Male	37	10 years	Dammam	MA in Economics	90 minutes	8 years	Twitter & Snapchat	<i>Makkah</i>	895 K	Yes
Colm5	Male	52	4 years	Dammam	MA in Management and Economics	90 minutes	3 years	Twitter & Snapchat	<i>Al-Watan</i>	301K	Yes
Colm6	Male	46	10 years	Al-Riyadh	BA in Financial Management	90 minutes	over 25 years	Twitter	<i>Okaz</i>	272K	Yes
Colm7	Male	41	8 years	Eastern Area	BA in Financial Management	90 minutes	5 years	Twitter	<i>Al Yaum.</i>	24.9K	No
Colm8	Male	39	4 years	Al-Riyadh	MA in Economics	2 hours	14 years	Twitter	<i>Al-Riyadh</i>	34K	No
Colm9	Male	46	4 years	Al-Riyadh	BA in Economics	90 minutes	11 years	Twitter	<i>Al-Jazeera</i>	39.5K	Yes
Colm10 ^b	Male	45	7 years	Al-Riyadh	BA in Statistics and Economics	2 hours	24 years	Twitter	<i>Al-Eqtisadiyah</i>	43.8K	Yes

CJ= Citizen Journalism

a This interviewee was awarded the Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum Prize for the most effective influential economic affairs personality on SM.

b This interviewee also has 20 years of experience as an investor on the stock market.

5.2.2 Public Figures in the Field of Economics Considered Influential on Twitter

Interviews were conducted with three of the five Saudi public figures on Twitter who have a background and experience in the field of economic affairs. They are all considered influential in SM in the KSA. These interviewees are identified as PF1-3 respectively (see Table 5.2). Each interviewee in the sample was asked the same set of 16 questions and further questions were added if an individual's responses merited further probing. All these figures used Twitter as a media platform for CJ because it was a quick and easy way of publishing their views.

PF1 (@Alkamilk) has been an expert in Saudi banking for 20 years. After writing an article for the Saudi press that was banned, he turned to Twitter and became an influential individual on this SM platform in the KSA.

PF2 (@FALKassim) has worked in a real estate investment company since 2010 and is also a member of the management of the Saudi Centre for Commercial Arbitration. In addition, he has been writing newspaper articles on business for 12 years. After having his articles banned and altered, he originally decided to post these on his blog; in 2010, he started to share his opinions on Twitter.

PF3 (@KSA24) Mojaz Al-Akhbar has a news account that tweets breaking news which is not published in the Saudi media. Originally, he had a personal Twitter account. A news webpage has also been created for PF3's Twitter account. He uses a group of correspondents who all have media experience as a source of news. PF3's Twitter account is distinctive since it uses an informal style of expression, breaking news in the Saudi variant of Arabic rather than the Modern Standard Arabic typically used by the media.

Table 0.2: Public figures in Saudi society considered influential on Twitter

ID	GENDER	AGE	LENGTH OF TIME AS CJ	REGION OF DOMICILE	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	LENGTH OF INTERVIEW	TYPE OF INTERVIEW	CJ PLATFORM	NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS ON 15/02/17	VERIFIED ACCOUNT
PF1	Male	45	6 years	Al-Riyadh	BA in Accounting	90 minutes	Face-to-face	Twitter	367K	Yes
PF2	Male	50	7 years	Al-Riyadh	BA in Financial Management	2 hours	Face-to-face	Twitter	55K	No
PF3	Male	50+	4 years	Al-Riyadh	MA in Political Science	1 hour	Phone	Twitter	3.5 million	Yes

CJ = Citizen journalism

5.2.3 Professional Journalists Writing on Economic Affairs for Saudi Newspapers

Interviews were conducted with 17 of the 24 professional journalists who write about economic affairs in the following Saudi newspapers: *Al-Jazeera* (identifier = J), *Al-Riyadh* (R), *Okaz* (O), *Al-Yaum* (Y), *Al-Watan* (W) and *Al-Eqtisadiyah* (E). All these journalists are members of the SJA. In 2016, new conditions were imposed by the SJA, limiting membership to full-time journalists and any individual without SJA membership was eliminated from this sample. Interviewees are identified by a newspaper code followed by their individual identifier, for example, J(Prof2) refers to the second interviewee from *Al-Jazeera* (see Table 0.3). Each interviewee in the sample was asked the same set of 11 questions and further questions were added if an individual's responses were thought to merit further probing.

Table 0.3: Professional journalists writing on economic affairs

NAME OF NEWSPAPER	ID	GENDER	AGE	LENGTH OF TIME AS JOURNALIST	REGION OF DOMICILE	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	LENGTH OF INTERVIEW	TYPE OF INTERVIEW	CJ PLATFORM	VERIFIED ACCOUNT
AL-RIYADH	PROF1	Male	46	17 years	Riyadh	MA in Media	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter WhatsApp YouTube	No
	PROF2	Male	38	13 years	Riyadh	BA in Media and Journalism	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
	PROF3	Male	48	9 years	Riyadh	High School Certificate	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
	PROF4	Male	30	4 years	Riyadh	BA in Arabic Language	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
AL-JAZEERA	PROF1	Male	38	14 years	Riyadh	BA in Islamic Studies	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
	PROF2	Male	45	12 years	Riyadh	BA in Management	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
	PROF3	Male	50	23 years	Riyadh	High School Certificate	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
AL EQTISADIAH	PROF1	Male	37	2 years	Riyadh	MA in Media	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
	PROF2	Male	40	8 years	Riyadh	BA in Islamic Studies	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
	PROF3	Male	39	18 years	Riyadh	Management and Marketing Diploma	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter Facebook	Yes

NAME OF NEWSPAPER	ID	GENDER	AGE	LENGTH OF TIME AS JOURNALIST	REGION OF DOMICILE	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	LENGTH OF INTERVIEW	TYPE OF INTERVIEW	CJ PLATFORM	VERIFIED ACCOUNT
OKAZ	PROF1	Male	38	15 years	Jeddah	High School Certificate	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
AL YAUM.	PROF1	Male	35	5 years	Dammam	High School Certificate	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	No
	PROF2	Male	46	10 years	Dammam	MA in Management	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter WhatsApp	No
	PROF3	Male	38	10 years	Dammam	BA in Arabic Language	One hour	Face-to-face	Twitter	Yes
AL-WATAN.	PROF1	Male	33	10 years	Abha	Higher Diploma in Quranic Studies	One hour	Telephone	Twitter WhatsApp	No
	PROF2	Female	32	6 years	Abha	BA in History	One hour	Telephone	Twitter	No
	PROF3	Male	39	5 years	Abha	MA in Marketing	One hour	Telephone	Twitter	No

CJ = Citizen journalism

5.3 Creation of Thematic Maps

It was not possible to start the formal coding process until the transcripts of the entire data set had been written up and translated from Arabic to English. The names of these various codes, along with a brief description, were written onto separate pieces of paper and then these were organised into various initial themes. By means of a repeated process of refinement (thematic mapping), a small number of main themes and their sub-themes were then distilled into a final thematic map which identified three key themes: CJ, PI and Twitter.

The thematic maps shown in Figures 5.1-5.3 illustrate the original themes and sub-themes that were gradually combined and reduced to produce Figure 5.4 which provides the thematic overview of the analysis of the interview data. The findings of this process are presented and discussed in detail in the sections which follow.

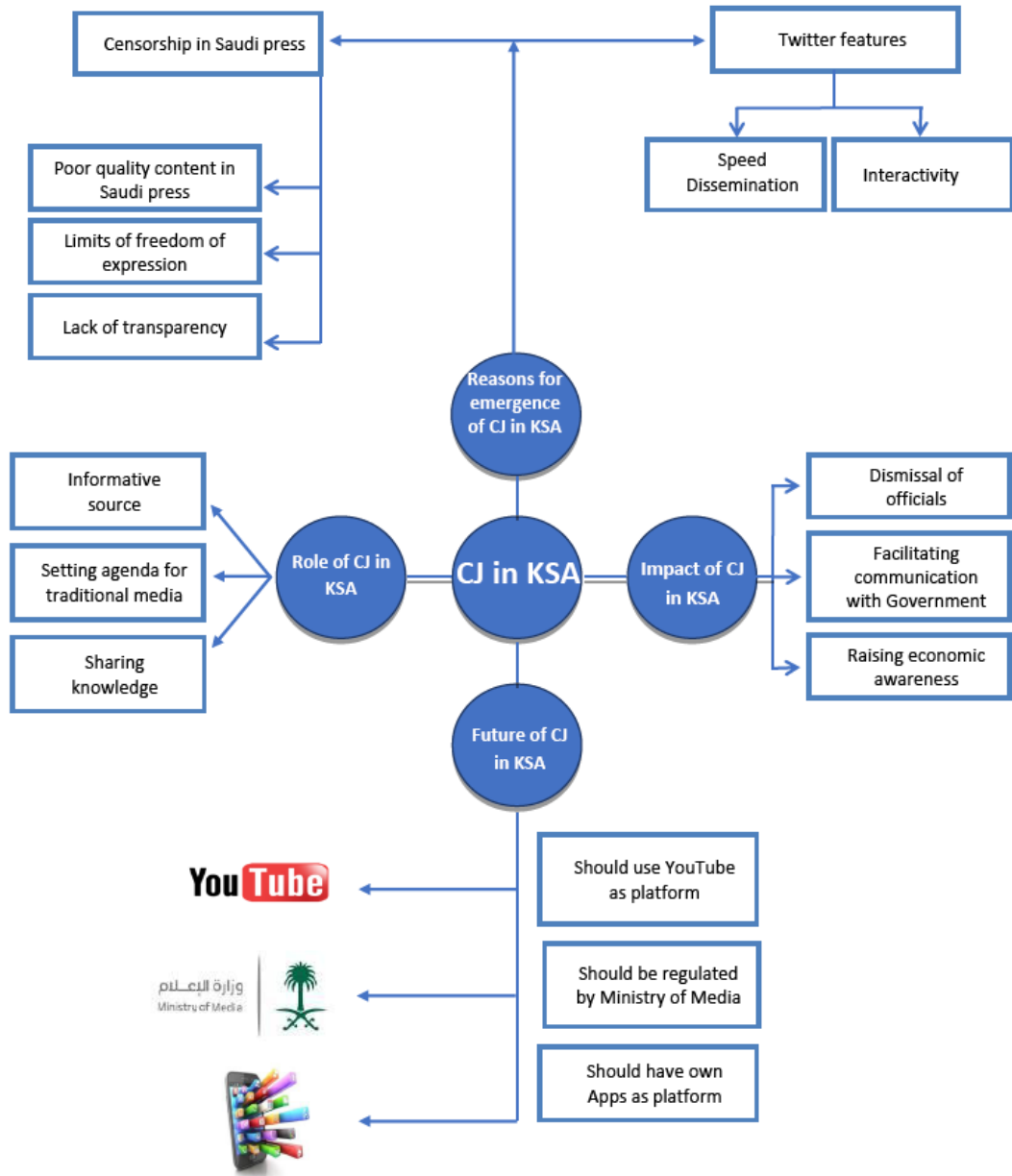


Figure 0.1: Thematic Map 1 - Saudi CJ

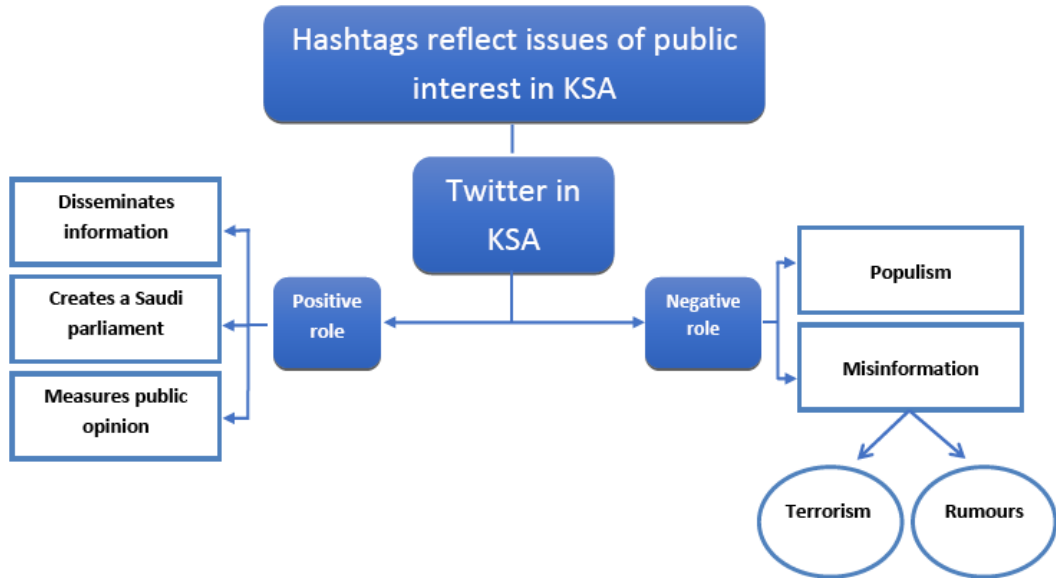


Figure 0.2: Thematic Map 2 - Twitter in the KSA

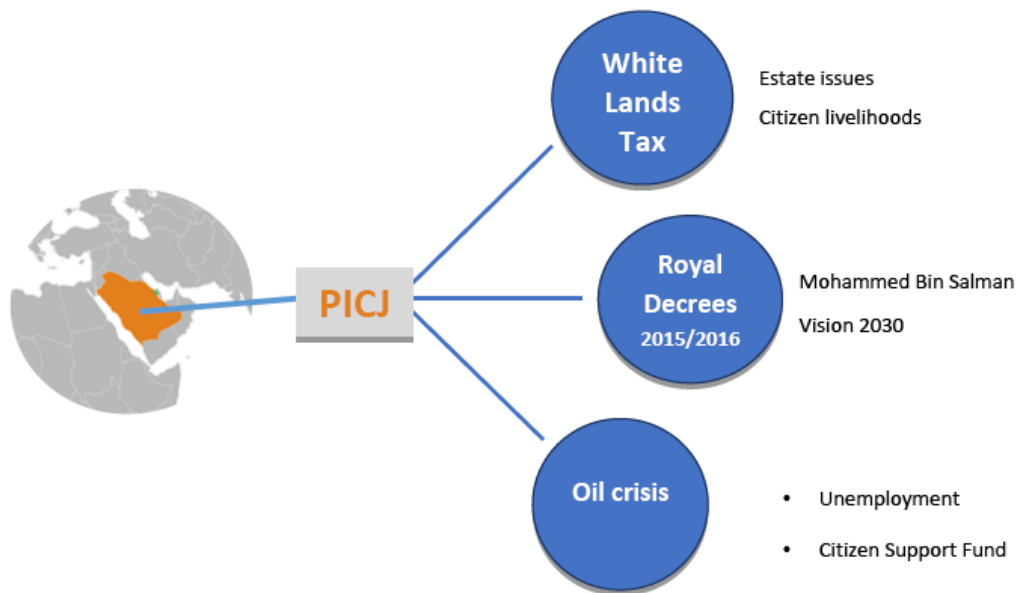


Figure 0.3: Thematic Map 3 - PICJ

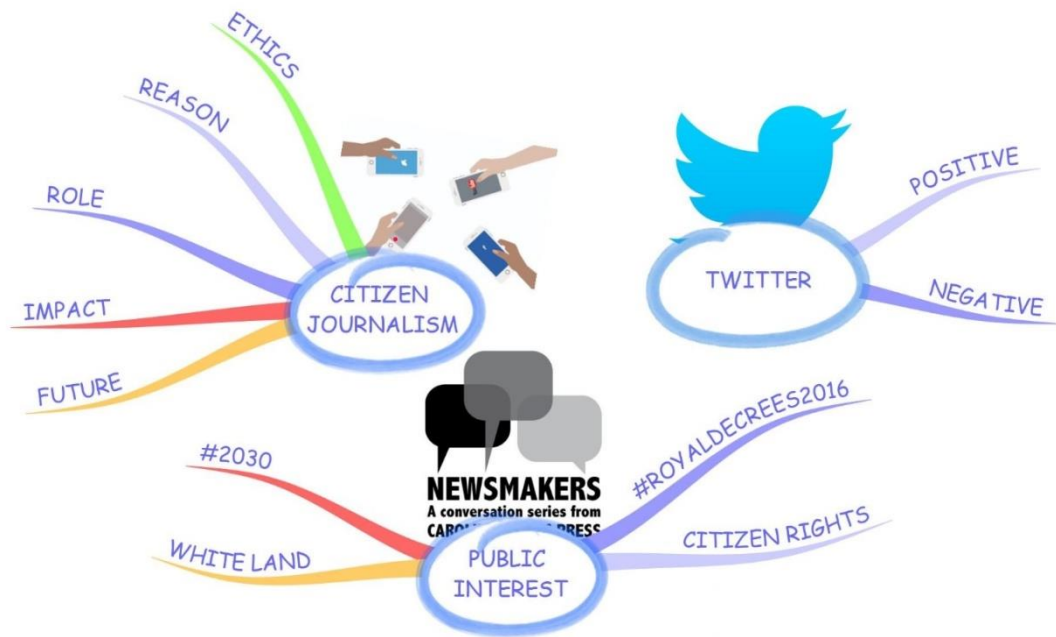


Figure 0.4: Thematic Map 4: Key themes of interview data

5.4 Saudi CJ Themes

5.4.1 Theme 1: Reasons for the Emergence of Saudi CJ

5.4.1.1 Censorship in the Saudi Press

All interviewees agreed that the main problem in relation to press censorship is that censors make judgments about issues that they do not understand and focus only on what rules say. This system of censorship effectively created CJ that is in evidence.

More specifically, some of the **columnists** interviewed agreed that the problem of state-controlled censorship in the Saudi press means that some subjects are considered “taboo” (Colm2) for economic affairs writers, leading them to resort to CJ (hereafter, CJ). Colm10 referred to reports he had written about “violations of the law by communications companies and banks which no Saudi newspaper would agree to publish”. He was told that they were sources of advertising revenue for those publications, suggesting that they were more interested in their potential financial losses than the significance of the content.

Colm9, Colm3 and Colm7 offered alternative viewpoints on this issue of censorship in Saudi press. They argued that this type of control exercised by traditional newspapers is more professional than the control present in CJ as it protects the rights of the writer. If a newspaper refuses to carry a writer's work, this shields him/her from problems and ensures their safety.

With regard to **public figures**, PF2 also thought that censorship of Saudi press was one of the factors that had helped CJ to emerge. He noted that he was "always arguing with the editor-in-chief" who refused to publish any of the articles presented to him, meaning they were subjected to "unreasonable control" as a result of the fact that the Saudi media is filled with "prohibited items". These arguments over every article lasted two weeks, with instructions to delete things, and change titles or words. PF1 also noted that he decided "not to write in the traditional press" but to publish on Twitter after his first article was banned, pointing out that as a CJ you are the editor-in-chief and personally accountable for what you write. He also observed that "if the traditional press were guaranteed to be open for everyone, then people would have found it 'refreshing'". That would mean that everyone could express their opinions on different subjects/companies without the content being altered. So, it is a platform that allows everyone to have their say and share opinions freely. The public figures interviewed thought that if they could express their opinions freely in the press, they would not have needed to resort to CJ on SM (give examples of interviewees that expressed this opinion).

Professional journalists asserted that citizen journalists can raise issues of concern more easily than those writing for the press. E(Prof1) noted that CJ was able to shed light on issues which traditional journalism could not due to controls exercised by editors-in-chief or the state. He also indicated that some issues such as so-called 'White Lands' tax are given "limited coverage in the Saudi press". O(Prof1) noted that the traditional press "is highly restricted" by the fact that it cannot publish anything that would upset those advertising in the newspaper as this would lead to a loss of revenue.

CJ is seen as being independent and allowing uncensored publication as a result of by-passing the controls to which traditional media are subjected in the KSA. It is also perceived as being more likely to report in a more realistic way on issues that interest Saudis.

5.4.1.2 Limits of Freedom in the Saudi Press

Saudi CJ allows greater freedom of expression than the traditional press. It provides media openness and freedom in comparison to the conservative mainstream Saudi media. **Columnists** indicated that as a result of the economic crisis that the KSA is experiencing, citizens lack confidence in the coverage offered by official media on the effects of this crisis. Colm2 added that writers with “extensive knowledge and experience in the economics sector” have a key role to play in examining issues from the citizens’ perspective “and not from the viewpoint of the editor-in-chief”. For Colm9, “explaining information in an objective way without exaggeration so that it does not lose its value” is one of the reasons why CJ emerged. Colm4 thought that it gave him “greater freedom” as what he writes goes direct to recipients. Moreover, Colm1 noted that if issues such as “corruption and poverty” have been aired on Twitter, this gives those writing for the traditional press more freedom to address these also. Colm6 stressed the need for “news sources to be independent”.

Professional journalists acknowledged that CJ enjoys a level of freedom that is not available in the Saudi press. Y(Prof3) stressed that it is unrestricted, lacking “red lines, taboos and control”. O(Prof1) agreed that citizen journalists writing about economic issues did not face any restrictions. Interviewees at *Al-Eqtisadiyah* thought that citizen journalists were free from interference and able to provide the information they chose, and according to E(Prof3) they were “freer and more independent than professional journalists”. W(Prof2) also thought that “the level of freedom” was the key factor that distinguishes a citizen journalist from a professional one. J(Prof3) specifically linked the degree of freedom that citizen journalists enjoyed with their use of Twitter. In the opinion of R(Prof1), a professional journalist is

bound by legislation when writing about issues, whereas a citizen journalist may tackle issues “in a bolder way”.

All the individuals in the sample agreed that CJ allows them a greater degree of freedom than writing for the Saudi press when putting forward ideas, expressing opinions, and providing information.

5.4.1.3 Poor Quality Content in Saudi Press

In 2015, citizen journalists were very active as a result of the political and economic changes that the KSA was experiencing in the wake of the financial crisis. With regard to the relationship between citizen journalists and Saudi citizens, interviewees confirmed that CJ contributed to raising economic awareness by using non-specialist language and visual information in the form of images, graphics, infographics and figures to convey economic information.

Columnists highlighted the lack of transparency in dealing with news on the part of official and governmental authorities. Colm5 stressed that, “All official news hides the information that the government does not want its citizens to know”. He added that Saudi citizens sarcastically refer to state television channels as *Ghasb* 1 and *Ghasb*³² (meaning ‘restricted’) rather than the real name because their content is heavily censored. Colm6 argued that state media need to work on their “transparency”. According to Colm1, the “lack of information sources was the reason for the emergence of CJ” while Colm4 thought that “a lack of trust in traditional news sources” created a need for specialist commentators on Twitter. Some individuals added that CJ can be useful when economic affairs journalists are deciding which issues to follow up in the traditional press. Colm9 claimed that his CJ focuses on “the crucial issues” which he cannot mention in the articles on economic affairs that he writes for the Saudi press.

³² Further official channels have since been added known as the News Channel, the Cultural Channel, the Economic Affairs Channel, and the Children's Channel.

Among the **public figures**, this issue was discussed at some length by PF2 who asserted that the traditional press only represents “official opinion.” He explained:

Open any Saudi newspaper and you find twelve pages dedicated to welcoming the prince who is visiting the region for which he is responsible. It's his responsibility to visit the cities within his region. This kind of reporting is worthless. It only reflects community issues from the official point of view.

PF1 pointed to the fact that as a result of the economic crisis caused by falling oil prices, Saudi concerns started to be posted on Twitter because it is an independent platform that allows what is written to by-pass the censorship that exists for traditional media. It thus provides a fuller, more realistic picture of the situation. He said if a group of 20-25 year-olds were asked not to read Twitter for two days and instead follow the coverage about the KSA in the official press, they would point out that the traditional press are talking about a totally different world. They do not cover the same issues as citizen journalists. He also noted that although the level of press freedom has increased, the stories it covers still do not reflect the reality of Saudi society.

PF2 also commented on the poor quality of the material used in Saudi media, illustrating this with a personal anecdote:

A newspaper asked me for an interview about a topic. I replied that I didn't know anything about that particular topic. The man who called me said: “But we follow you and everyone knows you: you can talk about anything!” I insisted that I wasn't the right person to talk about this topic. However, I decided to put the newspaper to the test and gave the caller the contact details of a relative of mine who is a college student. Four days later, a half-page interview was published, describing him as an expert in economic affairs, even though the journalist who had contacted him hadn't asked what his job was, what experience he had, what he was studying and whether he knew anything about this particular topic or not!

With regard to content, all the public figures maintained that as citizen journalists, what they write differs from the coverage found in the traditional mass media. PF3's account, for example, was responsible for exclusively breaking the news of the death of King Abdullah and that of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud Alfaisal. The other public figures concentrated on posting informative messages about the economic crisis, explaining what

economic policy decisions would mean by relying on their economic expertise. PF2 stated that for him it felt like a “social duty” to tweet information based on his personal experience.

All interviewees were of the opinion that the poor quality of the content of Saudi media had created more active citizen journalists and an influential independent media based on the SM site Twitter.

It was generally agreed by the **professional journalists** that the absence of information and transparency in traditional media content had contributed to the emergence of CJ in this area. R(Prof3) pointed to the lack of specialists who understand economics and also to the fact that "the Real Estate Market is chaotic with everybody giving his own opinion" due to the lack of accurate interpretations and information on this market from official bodies. R(Prof4) confirmed that because some officials and ministers preferred not to provide information to the press, details about some economic issues are taken from foreign media sources such as Bloomberg Business and Market News.

R(Prof2) recounted an incident that happened to him while covering the 2016 State Budget:

I got the necessary information from the Ministry of Finance; and then went to Chief Editor for Economic Affairs, explaining that the figures were due to be announced the following day and we wanted to write a piece about what they were likely to mean. However, he refused, claiming that we had to wait until the official announcement by the Saudi News Agency.

Another issue highlighted by those in this group was the lack of media culture in the KSA, meaning, for example, that newspapers are not represented at important events. *Al-Riyadh* provided examples, noting that the traditional press was not sufficiently briefed about *Vision 2030* by the decision-maker, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, although the details of the plan "were announced and shown on Al-Arabiya News Channel". While covering the State Budget for 2016, R(Prof3) found that Saudi final year media studies undergraduates had never heard of the Saudi Press Agency (SPA). W(Prof2) also said that private media initiatives such as hosting the decision-maker of the 2030 Vision were unprofessional. She was referring to an event hosted by the AlArabiya channel for Prince Mohammed

bin Salman, and believed that this event should have been hosted by the Saudi press, which is the official Saudi media. O(Prof1) also noted the lack of transparency in traditional media, and claimed that some newspapers "embellish issues" unlike CJ which "tells it like it is".

However, E(Prof3) argued that in terms of credibility and trustworthiness, accurate information is more likely to be found in the traditional press. O(Prof1) stressed that these newspapers have more communication channels with information sources, ensuring that they operate more professionally. Journalists from *Al-Riyadh*, *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Watan* all stressed that citizen journalists do not comply with online publishing rules but despite this, Saudi citizens still trust some economic celebrities who practise CJ more than professional journalists, their popularity making them the preferred news source.

5.4.1.4 Speed of Dissemination in Social Media

All of the economic **columnists** interviewed agreed that the content of CJ can have a positive impact on writers and their followers due to the speed of dissemination. This contributes to raising economic awareness as information about economic affairs posted on Twitter spreads to WhatsApp and then forms the basis of educational material on Snapchat and YouTube. Twitter discussions about particular economic concepts are often clarified in audio or visual form on Snapchat and then form the basis of YouTube videos and are widely shared through WhatsApp (Colm5, Colm6, Colm3 and Colm4). Three of the interviewees commented that six hours after a tweet is first posted it is being shared on WhatsApp groups (Colm1, Colm9 and Colm2).

Public figures highlighted that the availability of tools for CJ had made them influential in Saudi society. Using his mobile, PF1 can take photographs and/or make audio recordings and then publish these on SM using Twitter. PF 2 emphasized that the level of popularity of Twitter among Saudis was partly due to the ease with which it can be used for "attaching links, photographs and video".

Another characteristic of CJ commented on by **professional journalists** is the fact that it speeds up the news process. Y(Prof2) noted that a citizen journalist can respond to events instantly whereas in a newspaper many bureaucratic procedures³³ must take place before news can be published.

5.4.1.5 Interactivity with Followers

According to **columnists**, CJ also allows writers to interact with followers and find out what their reactions are to topics. Colm6 indicated that the responses of his followers to his tweets about the new water tariff³⁴ had helped inspire him to discuss these ideas in an article “which was sanctioned by the relevant authorities and led to a range of reactions”.

One of the **public figures**, PF2, asserted that any mistakes he made in the information or grammatical errors “are usually corrected by my followers”. This kind of correction was one kind of interactivity between Saudi citizen journalists and their followers. They corrected grammar or spelling mistakes in Arabic and sometimes, if citizen journalists supported their tweets with incorrect quotations from the *Qur’an* or the *Hadith* (Prophet Mohammed’s teachings) they were immediately corrected by followers. For example, when Colm 3 explained the White Lands Tax on Snapchat, he supported his economic opinion with religious verses which he had incorrectly quoted and these were corrected by followers.

Among the **professional journalists**, the *Al-Eqtisadiah* sample also highlighted that this interactive feature is absent in the case of paper-based journalism because even if a newspaper has a SM presence, this is only a “news platform” according to E(Prof1). J(Prof1) highlighted that this interaction with recipients involves “explaining and simplifying economic concepts” which has a direct effect on citizens’ economic awareness. On the

³³ This process involves communication with the official body responsible for the information, meaning that any information of this type is normally published the following day.

³⁴ The National Water Company raised the tariff for water in January 2016 in an attempt to reduce consumption rates.

other hand, R(Prof2) noted that the interactive quality of CJ can have a negative aspect since those who write on economic affairs on Twitter are usually followed by those who support their viewpoint. This makes it easier to influence public opinion on certain issues, creating “a flock of followers” that simply support all the account holder’s ideas.

5.4.2 Theme 3: The role of CJ in the KSA

Agreement was also expressed about the need for accuracy and investigative research when presenting information to ensure this reflects specialist knowledge and experience. It was stressed that before tweeting it was important to ensure information was correct, that the most up-to-date statistics were attached, and that the numbers provided were accurate. This would help to guarantee that the information would be more reliable.

5.4.2.1 Source of Economic Information

When discussing the emergence of CJ and its relationship to the PI in journalism, interviewees indicated that it is one of the consequences of the KSA’s economic crisis. When an official decision was taken that affected the salaries of Saudi nationals, either by cancelling their allowances or stopping the annual increments that are linked to the pay scale of state employees, there was a great deal of ambiguity at the time the announcement was made. Thus, as citizens needed information that would explain to them exactly how the deduction in allowances would work, they resorted to Twitter to search for information from specialists.

All 10 economic affairs **columnists** agreed that they practise CJ by posting information and sharing their knowledge about economic affairs. Few Saudi citizens have a confident grasp of the concepts underpinning contemporary economics and require further information and help in understanding these. Colm9 said that he chose to post on Twitter because “Financial illiteracy is widespread in society”. Colm3 noted that most people do not know the meaning of terms like ‘budget’, ‘balance’, and ‘inflation’ and also stressed that it was this lack of knowledge that had led him “to attempt

to raise awareness about economic culture” by using his Twitter account. He added: “On Twitter, I share knowledge without argument” (see Appendix 12). He refers to his role as citizen journalist being simply to explain information according to his experience not to give an opinion either for or against any issue or economic policy decision. Colm5 mentioned that some officials even use terminology like ‘GDP’ incorrectly and this needed to be corrected. Colm7 was more specific, explaining that he used Twitter to “share stock market laws and legislation”.

Colm3 emphasized the need to improve popular knowledge about the current economic condition by exposing them to the point of view of specialists. Colm1 indicated that he has worked for a number of international organizations such as “The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the UN Financial Program”. If he cannot obtain the information he requires from Saudi sources, he uses international reports. Colm9, Colm8, Colm4 and Colm6 assert that 70% of their tweets about economic issues depend on facts, numbers, national and international economic reports. They explain these in simple language, as Colm6 stated “providing a clear and logical picture of the economic crisis.” Both Colm3 and Colm4 presented educational content by tweeting on economic terms and explaining this in detail on Snapchat and then uploading the material as videos on YouTube.

When **public figures** were asked about the reasons for the emergence of CJ, they pointed initially to the need for information during the Arab Spring as it spread throughout the Middle East. During this period of crisis and worrying developments across the region, many conflicting opinions were being voiced that were not being covered in the traditional Arab media. More recently, they considered CJ as important in making sense of the economic crisis caused by falling oil prices, when Saudi concerns started to be posted on Twitter because it is an independent platform that allows what is written to by-pass the censorship that exists for traditional media. According to PF2, it thus provides a fuller, more realistic picture of the situation. PF3 thought that it was also important to report any misdemeanours that took place in the KSA, such as illegal behaviour or offences committed by the ministries, with citizens reporting any problems

with a video. All three public figures emphasized that their objective in practising CJ is to provide accurate information as well as expressing their personal opinions and communicating with wide range of Saudis since, as PF2 noted, “even the man in the street is reading you”.

Among the **professional journalists**, Y(Prof2) highlighted the lack of institutions producing high-quality specialist professionals; instead, levels of professionalism were based on "personal efforts". *Al-Watan* journalists stressed that economics is "the physics of the human sciences", arguing that those with expertise in this area require more sources and data. *Al-Jazeera* interviewees also complained about the fact that some economic issues are not explained in sufficient detail in the traditional press, in case they harm official statements, whereas CJ on Twitter explains these issues in more detail. On the other hand, E(Prof2) confirmed that some issues such as White Lands Tax had been "raised by coverage in the Saudi press". He also added that some citizen journalists have a relationship with information sources, meaning they get their information from inside sources based in official institutions.

5.4.2.2 Agenda-Setting for Traditional Media

When asked about the attitudes of Saudi citizens and professional journalists towards CJ, all the individuals in the sample agreed that traditional media relies on CJ as a source of material, and that information from CJ is further circulated in traditional media.

All the **columnists** agreed that the traditional media rely on CJ as a source of material and stressed that CJ content is widely circulated in the traditional media. Colm1 mentioned that his postings often made the headlines in traditional newspapers and added that these tweets helped him to publish his articles “since they have been circulated as CJ”. Colm3 confirmed this, noting that his “Snapchats are used as material on television”. Colm2 indicated that in the wake of the money laundering issue, an investigation began on the following day, and parts of his tweets were used in the newspaper “without his prior permission.” All three **public figures** agreed that Twitter had proved to be a successful tool for delivering

CJ content in the KSA because of its popularity there. PF2 claimed its penetration rate has reached 90%.. Regarding whether the content of CJ is used as material by the traditional media, PF1 observed that “countless” tweets of his had appeared on talk shows and in press reports.

According to the **professional journalists**, Y(Prof3) indicated that he used CJ on Twitter “to gauge the importance of an economic event, rather than as a reliable source”. O(Prof1) said he relies on some “Twitter accounts belonging to writers on economic affairs” including “Abdul Hamid Al Amri, Essam Al Zamel, Mohammed Al Anqarai, and Rashid Al Fozan,³⁵ due to their in-depth knowledge of the subject of socioeconomics and sensitive issues that affect citizens”. E(Prof2) provided an example of problems and financial corruption in the General Association of Engineers³⁶ which was revealed in a tweet as a noteworthy event.

5.4.3 Theme 4: The Impact of CJ on Saudi Society

Regarding the impact of CJ on Saudi society, respondents replied that the biggest impact has been on Saudi youth, as they are the largest group who interact on Twitter. CJ allows them a degree of freedom and their rapid response to events is part of leading on news stories (see 0).

5.4.3.1 Direct Impact on Decision-Makers

In 2015 King Salman dismissed some ministry officials who had provided poor services to Saudi citizens, as a result of videos recorded by citizens who posted these out on Twitter.

One of the **columnists**, Colm10, mentioned that Hisham Nathir, the Saudi Ambassador in Egypt, was dismissed because of a video shared by a female Saudi citizen in which she complained about being mistreated by him. One week after the video was published in 2011, he was dismissed.

³⁵ All four of these write about economic affairs in the Saudi press and are influential on social networks.

³⁶ This was an unemployment issue related to the Saudi Council of Engineers.

However, others (Colm3, Colm9, Colm8, and Colm6) all thought that Twitter's impact on Saudi decision-makers as a tool used by citizen journalists has been exaggerated. They noted that some hashtags were not well received or failed to attract attention, citing as examples: #Wages_are_not_enough³⁷ and #Dismissing_the_Civil_Service_Minister_Khalid_AIAraj³⁸. These four columnists thought that hashtags of this type are simply used to absorb popular anger and have little impact on decision-makers.

PF1 was the only one of the **public figures** to comment on the popularity of CJ on SM and claimed that this had made Twitter into a news source, a discussion forum for expressing opinions and contributed to many political decisions, including the dismissal of Minister of Health, Ahmed Alkhateeb.³⁹ Another specific example was given by one of the **professional journalists**, O(Prof1), who pointed to the role that citizen journalists had played in exposing the misdemeanours of the Minister of Civil Service.⁴⁰

³⁷ This hashtag was launched in 2013 for Saudis to express their ideas about the rise in living costs in comparison with salaries.

³⁸ After official statements regarding the deduction of certain salary allowances and bonuses for public sector workers following the 2016 Royal Decrees, sarcastic hashtags were tweeted to mock some of the statements provided by officials from the Minister of Finance, the Minister of the Civil Service and the Minister of Economics. The latter had criticized Saudi citizens' lack of productivity which he claimed amounted to only one hour per day and gave this as the reason for deducting some salary bonuses from state employees.

³⁹ Alkhateeb was Minister of Health in 2015. The hashtag # Shames Shardzah came from the words he addressed to a villager who came to the Saudi capital in person to ask Alkhateeb for better medical treatment for his father by referring him to the big hospitals in Riyadh. Alkhateeb's reply '*Shames shardzah*' (The Minister is not a magic man) meant that he would not do anything about his request and was subsequently dismissed.

⁴⁰ The Minister of the Civil Service had abused his position by employing his son (who had only completed his secondary education) on a very high salary. Hashtags on this topic such as #Al Araj Hour, #Civil Service Minister's Son's Salary and #Governmental Employees' Productivity Is One Hour started to trend in the KSA.

5.4.3.2 Raising Levels of Economic and Social Awareness Among Saudis

CJ has helped to speed up the dissemination of information, to measure its impact and to raise the level of economic and social awareness among the Saudi public.

Colm1, one of the **columnists**, referred to a Saudi study conducted in 2006 about investment and financial awareness that concluded that only 1% of Saudi citizens had any real understanding of this subject. When it was repeated in 2014, awareness was found to have risen to a level of 12% when citizens had begun to understand economic terms such as 'price inflation', and 'housing crisis'. Colm5 asserted that CJ has contributed to raising the awareness of Saudi citizens concerning "their rights in the different ministries". Colm7 also noted that it helped citizens to be aware of "their social responsibility to report any misdemeanours committed".

Colm1 made an interesting comparison between what he believed to be the difference in the levels of economic awareness found in articles published in the traditional press and information posted by citizen journalists, claiming this was like "the understanding of a first-grade secondary school student versus that of a first-year undergraduate or even a Masters student". On the topic of PI stories covered by CJ, Colm6 mentioned the following example: "A child was being kept in hospital because her family had not paid the hospital bill; this issue was tweeted on my account and became an issue of PI; and was later covered in the Saudi press".

According to **public figures**, CJ has raised awareness of various topics in Saudi society. As a result of the economic crisis, influential figures emerged on Twitter who were able to explain economic terms related to new Royal Decrees, such as 'Citizen's Account', 'White Lands Tax', '*Vision 2030*', salary deductions and cancellation of bonuses for public sector staff. This group of interviewees highlighted the example of #White Lands Tax as a social issue which trended on Twitter when fees were imposed on speculators. Citizens are now aware of the situation and what the manipulation of real estate by speculators actually means and the impact it

has. All of the public figures thought that most citizens still have no idea what *Vision 2030* is about (even though it has been outlined in the traditional media) due to the absence of transparency in providing information by the government.

PF1 noted that the power and influence of CJ in raising awareness and covering key issues has also been acknowledged by Saudi decision-makers and officials. He gave the example of having been invited by the Crown Prince along with other influential Saudis to a presentation of the new budget before it was announced officially in the media, commenting that “there was open discussion until 4:30 am with a high level of freedom of expression”. PF2 observed that he had played a role in raising awareness about *Vision 2030* and in explaining the implications that this would have for Saudi society and his tweets had been very popular, with views reaching one million.

All the interviewees emphasized as well that reporting by citizen journalists is more effective in Saudi society because it is considered to be a powerful tool affecting public opinion in the KSA. PF3 noted that according to Twitter analytics, his account is considered to be the most influential in the Middle East as a region.

Professional journalists thought that both CJ and traditional journalism have contributed to raising Saudi citizens’ awareness regarding economic issues. *Al-Yaum* interviewees highlighted how journalists have helped citizens to better understand government economic policy, such as the White Lands Tax. W(Prof2) also noted that #White Lands Tax remained active for three years, producing over 20,000 tweets. J(Prof2) made the point that issues that were mentioned on Twitter then received in-depth coverage in the mainstream press since this allows greater possibilities for providing detailed explanations. W(Prof3) echoed this thought, pointing out that economic issues “cannot be easily dealt with in just one Tweet”. For E(Prof3), both citizen journalists and their mainstream equivalents deserved the credit for raising Saudi awareness about economic issues.

There was a range of opinions concerning how CJ should be categorized as a practice. O(Prof1) referred to it as "journalism by

individuals" which is intended to "cover citizens' issues and interpret economic events". *Al-Watan* interviewees thought it was "populist journalism" which touches on the issues affecting ordinary citizens, or "civic journalism" which focuses on situations and problems involving citizens and does not belong to certain organisations. J(Prof3) described it as "the mirror of society's concerns". The point was also made that CJ has also contributed to helping people understand some economic concepts by using a simple style and providing more detailed information.

CJ has contributed to raising the awareness of Saudi citizens concerning their rights in the different ministries, their human rights, and their social responsibility to report any misdemeanours committed.

5.4.3.3 Citizen Journalists as Opinion Leaders and Social Influencers

It was also stressed that the provision of accurate information and the objective explanation of economic issues by citizen journalists who were specialists in the field contributed to building trust and confidence between them and their followers.

Among the **columnists**, Colm7 mentioned that his Twitter account acts as "an office providing consultations about the field of economics". Colm9 maintained that as a result of the objective content he posted and his credibility, "the number of his followers increased by 100% in the space of twelve months", although he did not give the numbers involved. Colm5 also considered that the credibility he enjoys amongst his followers is demonstrated by the fact that his postings are re-tweeted even before they have been fully read. He gave the example of a tweet with a 30-second video attached being re-tweeted within 10 seconds, meaning it could not even have been fully viewed.

One of the **public figures**, PF1, said that preparing the content of a tweet takes him two hours, checking sources from a range of official Saudi or international news agencies including CNN, BBC and the *New York Times* "in order to be 100% correct". He noted that "As a result, I am seen as being a very trustworthy source". PF2 claimed to take a similar amount of care in producing tweets and explained "I write the tweet in the notes

application and read it through many times before posting it. It is checked and corrected after reviewing, then finally posted”.

5.4.3.4 Channel of Communication with the Government

As a platform for citizen journalists, Twitter opens up channels of communication between individuals who are influential in SM and officials. Influential people on Twitter were invited to a meeting with Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the presentation of the budget and to discuss economic solutions as well as delivering this to the public on Twitter using the hashtag #Happy-2-meet.

According to **columnists**, Twitter has created a communication channel between the Saudi authorities and citizens which has contributed to the former providing more information. Colm1 mentioned that he tweeted a complaint to the Ministry of Transportation about the state of a road in the south of the KSA: "15 minutes after the tweet, I was contacted by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage asking me to send the coordinates of the location. They were sent to the Ministry of Transportation, and the road was fixed within 48 hours". Colm2 pointed out that in 2016 “The Ministry of Finance⁴¹ used its account to post the Budget reports” for the first time and sent alerts to its followers.

The **public figures** PF1 and PF3 confirmed that Saudi ministers and officials have called them as a result of tweets they have posted about various issues. PF1 maintained “If you do not embarrass the ministry with a tweet available to all, then the message does not get through”. The purpose is to “embarrass the ministry until there are improvements to their services.” PF1 also noted that influential people on Twitter were invited to a meeting with Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the presentation of the budget for *Vision 2030* and to discuss economic solutions as well as delivering this to

⁴¹ The Ministry of Finance released details of the 2016 budget using a Twitter account. It is used to interact with Saudis to share updated information and annual reports from government ministries. Some State officials use it as an information platform that helps spread news faster.

the public on Twitter using the hashtag #Happy-2-meet. In other words, the public figures were sure that Twitter would reveal the issue with CJ delivering the message to the authorities.

According to **professional journalists**, another point in Twitter's favour is the presence of most of the Saudi governmental institutions on this platform, together with officials, ministers and the King himself. Moreover, according to J(Prof2), "ministers follow Twitter content more than they follow mainstream journalism". Y(Prof3) claimed that Twitter served as a channel of communication for 99% of Saudi officials while interviewees from *Al-Eqtisadiyah* added that this communication with officials via Twitter facilitates the tracking down of information. Both R(Prof4) and E(Prof1) commented on the fact that Twitter is a major source for information flow. *Al-Watan* journalists highlighted the fact that Twitter has removed immunity from government officials, making it possible for citizens to criticize ministers.

The swiftness by which authorities can convey their message to citizens was stressed by E(Prof1) who gave the example of #Happy-2-meet. W(Prof2) mentioned that citizen journalists who focus on economic affairs on Twitter were among the first individuals to know about the decision about White Lands Tax.

The interviewees agreed that citizen journalists facilitated the process of communicating between citizens and officialdom. It also helped to raise awareness about issues that are of concern to citizens. They also claimed that it made officials accountable and contributed to reform by revealing mistakes that had been made. Moreover, according to W(Prof2), it has impacted on people's habits of sharing knowledge as now 70% of Saudi society is reading the news and trading information on Twitter.

Interviewees gave the following reasons to explain why Saudi citizen journalists prefer to use Twitter rather than other SM platforms:

1. Twitter's level of popularity among Saudis.
2. The ease with which it can be used for attaching links, photographs and video.
3. The hashtag feature that identifies the most important trending issues and shows the number of tweets.
4. Most government institutions in the KSA have Twitter accounts, as do officials and ministers.

5. Having an account for the current Saudi monarch, King Salman.
6. The spread of smartphones amongst members of Saudi society.
7. Its technological reliability and news applications.
8. The fact that Twitter is available for free means it has spread throughout all sectors of society and allows ordinary citizens to have a voice.

5.4.4 Theme 5: Ethics of CJ

All the **columnists** who were interviewed agreed that in CJ writers are responsible for themselves, and they all adhere to professional standards when writing on Twitter. They all made it clear that they do not mention or publish any information obtained from the media organization they write for when using Twitter and they are also aware about online publishing rules.

Colm3 pointed out that if his followers inquire about investing, he refrains from giving them any direct advice in accordance with “the regulations of the Capital Market Authority”. Colm10 mentioned that he sometimes posts sarcastic tweets while still following “online publishing laws”. He illustrated this with an example, citing his criticism of the speech delivered by the Saudi Minister of Labour which promised that the Saudization and nationalization of the communications sector would take place within six months. In response, Colm10 posted an image on his account of the Ministry’s Saudization Plan⁴² from 18 years ago and its promise to Saudize the private sector. He added, “I leave the rest up to the reader”. That means he respects Saudi online regulations, issued in 2011, and the Anti-Cyber Crime Law which came into force in 2007.

Public figures also pay attention to Saudi online publishing rules. PF1 said “Abdul Hamid Al Amriand I brought a case relating to the Anti-Cyber Crime Law”.⁴³ He also asserts that “The Bureau of Investigation and

⁴² This was intended to prioritise employment of Saudi citizens in private companies instead of foreigners.

⁴³ The Anti-Cyber Crime Law was issued by the Council of Ministers Decision No.97, dated 2007 and was approved by Royal Decree No. M/17, dated 2007. The Act was promulgated in the issue 4144 of the Official Gazette *Um AlQura* in 2007.

Public Prosecution⁴⁴ and the Police Department have become aware of online published issues and had certain procedures to deal with these".⁴⁵

For **professional journalists**, the current situation in CJ was considered to be chaotic by *Al-Watan* interviewees who emphasized the need for standards to be imposed that would stop individuals without the necessary specialist expertise from expressing their opinion, since in the current situation anyone can claim to be an economics analyst. They also argued that paper-based journalism is more credible than CJ. Y(Prof1) pointed out that traditional media must conform to press legislation concerning credibility, unlike CJ, which may carry incorrect information.

5.4.5 Theme 6: The Future of CJ

With respect to the future of CJ, interviewees confirmed that it would remain but thought that a range of tools and applications should be used, allowing freedom of expression and contributions from citizens.

The sample of **columnists** agreed on the necessity for standards that control CJ and protect the rights of 'tweeps'.⁴⁶ They also agreed on the need for an independent non-governmental organization that would be responsible for punishing those who spread knowingly false information. This organization should also be authorised to organize content, ban non-specialists from displaying information, and questioning them about cases of inaccuracy. Colm2 proposed the need for a special SM platform that provides more transparent information at times of crisis. In addition, Colm3

⁴⁴ The Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution was established in 1995. The law declares that Bureau members have "full independence" and are subject only to the provisions of *shari'ah*.

⁴⁵ Saudi Police have developed an app called Kamnap (We all are policemen) that can be used for reporting online issues. After logging the incident on the app and writing any necessary explanatory notes, this report together with a screenshot of any offending material is sent as an attachment to the police station you select as being most convenient.

⁴⁶ A tweep is the popular term for someone who uses Twitter to send and receive tweets.

voiced the opinion that Snapchat would replace Twitter as an information platform for audio-visual posting as it was more versatile.

Colm4 mentioned that Twitter laws should differ from those for other media and there should not be any restrictions on the freedom of citizen journalists. Colm9 stressed the need for the establishment of an organization that was appropriate for new media, to help you "develop your style, and present the correct information".

Colm10 suggested the presence of a channel like YouTube or Snapchat specifically for citizen journalists to publish media content.

Public figures suggested that there needed to be an association in which citizens could participate to combat corruption, voice their opinion and ensure the accountability of officials. They agreed that there was a need for standards to regulate CJ and protect the rights of users and that an independent non-governmental organization should be set up with the powers to impose penalties on those who spread rumours or falsified content. They also thought that non-specialists should not be allowed to circulate information or should be questioned if this was incorrect. PF2 suggested that there needed to be a platform reserved for citizen journalists that could be linked with YouTube, requiring a name and ID. It should allow criticism, even of members of the royal family, and accept alternative opinions. PF3 suggested that reporting by citizen journalists on Twitter should be organized by the MoCI and Ministry of the Interior and should be used to increase the awareness of citizens, alerting them to suspicious accounts and those who are spreading false rumours.

With respect to their views concerning regarding the future of CJ, all of the mainstream **professional journalists** believed that CJ will continue but is likely to employ different tools and applications. Interviewees from *Al-Eqtisadiyah* pointed to the need for a platform that would allow dissemination of high-quality audio-visual messages like Snapchat and YouTube. Journalists from *Al-Watan* stressed the importance of their independence. W(Prof1) predicted that official bodies will increasingly rely on polls conducted via their Twitter accounts when making certain decisions.

Suggestions were also made about the need to impose standards and criteria that which help in the balance of the flow of information and the creation of an online site that would allow interaction with recipients. Journalists from *Al-Yaum* thought that such a site ought to have a connection with traditional paper journalism so as to be more professional and credible. Interviewees working for *Al-Riyadh* highlighted the importance of applying electronic publishing law rigorously in order to organize content. This was also stressed by O(Prof1). Y(Prof3) suggested this organization should belong to the MoCI and the Communications City of King Abdul Aziz.

However, the sample of mainstream journalists from *Al-Riyadh* thought that the Saudi Journalism Association should be the umbrella for citizen journalists while their counterparts from *Al-Jazeera* made the suggestion that every professional journalist should have a Twitter news account called "individual journalism", O(Prof1) stressed the need for higher standards in content organization, a point echoed by those from *Al-Eqtisadiah* who also highlighted the importance of preserving the rights of the 'tweeter'.

In relation to the future of CJ, interviewees were sure that this would continue but perhaps using different tools and applications.

5.4.6 Theme 7: PICJ

What might be termed recognisable PICJ on SM in the KSA began during the Arab Spring of 2010-2011 and developed further as a result of recent oil crises in the region. During this period of crisis with worrying developments across the region, many conflicting opinions were voiced that were not covered in the traditional Arab media. The sample interviewees agreed that CJ is characterised by focusing on the concerns and interests of citizens. They also assert that PICJ in the KSA was in response to Saudis' avowed desire for fast and accurate information.

Columnists thought that CJ has contributed to promoting interest in various trends in the KSA which were previously not covered in the traditional media outlets. Colm3 thought that the traditional media had

“marginalized” a large sector of Saudi society and its interests, focusing on the elite rather than ordinary citizens.

As the result of the current economic crisis, economic decisions were made that directly affect people’s lives and their livelihoods (Colm4). Thus, most of the hashtags relating to these issues trend on Twitter, provide material for visual media outlets, and were discussed throughout Saudi society. Also, the interactivity of CJ had contributed to the emergence of PI in “issues that affect everyone” due to the economic crisis. Thus, Colm6 reported that he had found a platform that allowed him to pursue his interests in a wide range of issues:

- a. Real estate issues
- b. White Lands tax
- c. Political reform (monitoring and evaluates corruption in the public sector)
- d. Aspects of *Vision 2030*
- e. Unemployment
- f. Citizens’ Rights
- g. Article 77 of the new employment legislation⁴⁷
- h. #RoyalDecrees 2016 (those related to economic issues)
- i. #Citizens’ Support Fund

The **public figures** PF2 and PF3 thought that the content of CJ reflects the interests and concerns of Saudi citizens, describing it as a mirror of society. In addition, due to the interactivity offered by Twitter, it was possible to gauge the reactions of those who were following their tweets. They also thought that economic issues which are of greatest interest to ordinary people tend to emerge on CJ rather than in the traditional media. In 2015-2016, the focus was on economic policy decisions because they directly “affected the citizen’s pocket” (PF1). PF2 observed that the hashtag feature that identifies the most important trending issues and shows the number of tweets reflect Saudi concerns and interest. He also noted that he

⁴⁷ A loophole in current employment legislation means that an employee's contract in the private sector can be ended without any redundancy payment from the employer.

had played a role in raising awareness about *Vision 2030* and in explaining the implications that this would have for Saudi society and his tweets have been very popular, with views reaching one million. Although the popularity of an issue does not necessarily equate with it being a matter of PI, the interest generated by tweets about an economic issue of national importance does indicate that there is a hunger for this information and a need to debate the issue and ask questions about it, which arguably points to it being a matter that the public perceive as being in their interest to know more about.

Professional journalists agreed that Saudis were interested in CJ as a result of the need in Saudi society for accurate and timely information. Citizen journalists can raise issues of concern more easily than those writing for the press. E(Prof1) noted that CJ was able to shed light on issues which traditional journalism could not, due to controls exercised by the journalism organisation or the State. He also indicated that some issues such as White Lands tax are given "limited coverage in the Saudi press". *Al-Watan* journalists commented that the traditional Saudi media only publish "official" information which does not meet the requirements and interests of the general public. In the case of *Al-Riyadh* interviewees, they thought that the traditional media are characterized by "idleness" and they fail to address the concerns of ordinary Saudi citizens whereas CJ gives individuals the chance to convey their message. This was also stressed by O(Prof1) who indicated that advertisements have affected "coverage of social issues". J(Prof1) pointed to the fact that CJ has contributed to raising the level of awareness about consumer rights and commercial fraud, citing the example of #Panda Reductions.⁴⁸

The press, however, find it difficult to write about these issues as they fear losing advertising revenue. Some of the high-trending hashtags in the KSA focused on the interests of the ordinary citizen, which had been neglected by the traditional press. *Al-Riyadh* interviewees mentioned that

⁴⁸ This hashtag covered the issue of manipulation of commodity prices after an announcement concerning lower prices at Panda which is one of the largest food companies in the KSA.

"graduates of a particular institution"⁴⁹ had launched a boycott campaign against certain companies. According to *Al-Watan* journalists, CJ allowed citizens to express their opinions about the 2016 State Budget. They also observed that CJ issues are "populist" in nature, touching on those issues that affect citizens more than traditional journalism does. In addition, *Al-Yaum's* journalists expressed the belief that Twitter has become "ubiquitous".

There was general agreement that some of the issues raised by CJ were issues of PI, affecting Saudi citizens. Further discussion of this issue can be found in Section 7.5.

5.4.7 Theme 8: The Role of Twitter in the KSA

Evidence of the growth of what this thesis considers to be CJ on SM has made Twitter a source of news and a discussion forum for expressing opinions, as it has contributed to many political decisions, such as the dismissal of ministers and questioning governmental agencies. Interviewees were in agreement about the powerful impact of Twitter, and their observations on this are summarised below.

5.4.7.1 Dissemination and Promotion on Twitter

All of the **columnists** stressed that Twitter has contributed to helping disseminate and promote their articles, increasing their readership more than the Saudi press ever did. They noted that the number of readers for their articles in Saudi newspapers increased if articles were published on Twitter first. Colm1 indicated that, through his Twitter accounts, his articles reached 225 million views. Colm1 also mentioned that after tweeting links to his newspaper articles, the numbers of readers put them into the Top Five most-read articles for the publication. Colm4 also noted that Twitter helps to disseminate his articles widely. For example, his tweet about his article on

⁴⁹ A boycott campaign hashtags related to unemployment issues. One of them was started by a group of unemployed graduates who are demanding the opportunity to have a job.

the 'Patriarchal State' received 13,000 re-tweets. That means Twitter contributes to the dissemination and promotion of the articles economic affairs writers and the ideas and opinions within them.

One of the **public figures**, PF1, noted that "A newspaper columnist can get 50,000 readers. At the moment, with tweets and re-tweets, what's posted on an influential Twitter account may get two or three million views." All the public figures used Twitter as a media platform for CJ because it offered a quick and easy means of publishing. Furthermore, they added that the availability of tools for CJ made them influential in Saudi society. Using his mobile, PF1 noted that he can take photographs and make recordings and then publish these on SM using Twitter.

All of the **professional journalists** who were interviewed agreed that Twitter is the most used platform for CJ in the KSA due to its high level of penetration among Saudis as a SM form. Explaining its spread throughout all sectors of society, R(Prof1) referred to a "Twitter addiction" in Saudi society. Electronic applications like Twitter are popular in Saudi society and this SM platform is easy to use for creating links, images and audio-visual clips. Y(Prof3) noted that: "anyone with a Twitter account can take pictures and publish them".

All of the individuals in this sample thought that Twitter had contributed to raising the level of freedom in mainstream journalism, with interviewees from *Al-Eqtisadiah* claiming that this SM platform "has pushed traditional journalism to cover issues which were difficult to mention before".

5.4.7.2 Twitter as Saudi Parliament

Twitter may contribute to ensuring the accountability and transparency of the authorities and officials in the KSA. For **columnists**, it is considered to be "the voice of the people" and operates as an unofficial Saudi Parliament where the performance of various groups is always evaluated. According to Colm7, it has also created a culture of "if you have a problem, go to Twitter" while Colm10 believes it stimulates intellectual discussion and has created an atmosphere of dialogue that gives citizens the right to participate and express their personal opinion. Colm6 believed that it has also transformed

the government's decision-making from a unilateral process into a two-way dialogue on policy between the authorities and Saudi citizens.

Columnists also commented on its ability to exert pressure on decision-makers and officials. According to interviewees, CJ contributed to the imposition of White Lands Tax after this was explained on YouTube; the story was then published on Twitter, and gained popular approval. Colm5 added that feedback from CJ can be used to help develop the services of an organization. This is done by tweeting about it first; and then, writing an article about it; and finally re-tweeting the article's link until the official responds. Thus, it has created a culture of “opinion and the other opinion” (open dialogue) and has helped Saudis to gain an insight into subjects where opinion is divided such as liberal and conservative attitudes towards women’s issues. Colm10 mentioned this when saying that he had discovered “trends and streams which I would never have known existed if it had not been for Twitter”.

One of the **public figures**, PF1, thought that Twitter could be considered to act as an unofficial Saudi parliament, playing the role that should be played by journalism and free media, namely, combatting corruption, representing consumers, and making up for “the absence or failure of all these organizations within the KSA.” He believed that its role is primarily to tell the truth and express the opinions of Saudis to the authorities.

According to PF1, there were media platforms before Twitter but they were “controlled” by the conservative “traditional elites” and reflected “the voice of the KSA” not “the voice of citizens”. The first thing Twitter did was to replace these platforms with “1,000, 2,000, 5,000 or 10,000 platforms for the citizen.” In PF1’s opinion, Twitter has helped to create civil society in the KSA, representing citizens’ voice to the government. It was also generally agreed that citizen journalists on Twitter aim to post messages that are pro-reform, informative and enlightening.

Among the **professional journalists**, O(Prof1) thought Twitter had become a place where Saudi citizens feel free to “air complaints”. J(Prof3) referred to this platform as “the voice of the people and a place where they

can express their issues”. W(Prof2) also confirmed this, calling it the “voice of the voiceless”. It helps citizens express their issues more transparently, with *Al-Riyadh* interviewees noting that Twitter allows “open and uncontrolled media activity”.

In short, these Saudi users of Twitter believed that it has helped to create civil society in the KSA, representing citizens’ voice to the government.

5.4.7.3 Twitter as a Barometer of Public Opinion

Reaching out to a Saudi audience is quicker and easier on Twitter. Interviewees quoted statistics that confirm the powerful influence of Twitter in the KSA. According to **columnists**, Twitter has allowed economic affairs writers to create social networks, making them into opinion leaders who have been invited by the authorities to discuss some economic policy, such as the national budget and *Vision 2030* before these were officially announced in the traditional media.

It helps to form and direct public opinion, as reflected in the campaigns to boycott companies such as Almarai⁵⁰ when it raised its prices. It can be used to gauge public opinion and trends using the poll option, as Colm1 explained: “I start a poll, and receive more than 70,000 votes in less than 24 hours”. Colm5 added: “A university professor of Sociology asked me to discuss the issue of throwing away food after weddings on my account. Replies were wide ranging with comments and criticisms for and against; and these replies were then studied.”

All three **public figures** maintained that CJ made the individual journalist into a completely independent media outlet in terms of decisions on content, views, posting and orienting public opinion in addition to reporting the news professionally. Like some other **professional journalists**, Y(Prof2) claimed that Twitter had helped to shape public

⁵⁰ A Saudi company engaged in the field of agriculture and manufacture of dairy products such as milk, yogurt etc.

opinion and brought some issues to public attention.⁵¹ E(Prof1) thought that the ownership of smartphones and activity by Saudis on Twitter had contributed to making it a means of putting officials under pressure which ordinary people can use to call for their rights. O(Prof1) gave a specific example, pointing to the role that Twitter had played in exposing the misdemeanours of the Minister of Civil Service, as previously noted. According to W(Prof3), Twitter takes the “pulse of the people”. All interviewees agreed that some of the issues suggested and created in CJ then become public opinion issues affecting society.

5.4.7.4 Hashtags Reflect the Interests of the Saudi Public

Some interviewees claimed that Twitter reflects the interests of the Saudi public in its comments and the hashtags that appear directly following Royal Decrees or on issues that directly impact on citizens' economic life.

Columnists note that the foreign media rely on Twitter content from the KSA as a source of news, and this has led to analyses of Saudis' online activity. Colm7 provided the example of an American talk show host who discussed tweets from the KSA after a story covering an American student who asked his teacher for a retest; the teacher refused, instead challenging the student to "tweet his request for a retest, and obtain 50,000 re-tweets". This student asked his Saudi friends to help him. After the tweet was posted, it received 70,000 re-tweets in less than 24 hours, with 95% of the re-tweets being from within the KSA. Colm10 indicated that Twitter has also contributed to the emergence of virtual characters who seek to achieve what they cannot achieve in reality.

According to Colm6, "everyone expresses his opinion on Twitter". Everyone thinks their own view is right and they are particularly passionate and stubborn about their opinions on sport. These are some of the

⁵¹ In 2016 Saudis used SM to express their anger following the increase in the price of water and the Consumer Protection Association asked the government to rethink this decision. The Minister for Public Utilities Abdullah al-Hussayen was dismissed by King Salman and temporarily replaced by Agriculture Minister Abdel Rahman al-Fadli.

characteristics of a society that "likes to argue and discuss". It can be argued that this means Twitter has helped Saudi society to know itself better.

Public figures were also in agreement that Twitter has contributed to identifying Saudi society's interests as many different media rely on the top trending hashtags in the KSA and PF1 noted that these are discussed in talk shows created to analyse these trends such as Tafaol.com, a programme which airs on *Al Arabiya* channel, and others.

Mainstream **professional journalists** disagreed as to whether Twitter always reflects Saudi PI due to the presence of external campaigns intended to harm the KSA and cause conflict among its people. Interviewees from *Al-Riyadh* mentioned that deliberately inaccurate content appears on #Saudi_women_driving_cars.⁵² W(Prof1) claimed that "some hashtags have been created to spread inaccurate information by foreign groups". *Al-Eqtisadiyah* journalists thought that 60% of hashtags reflect what is happening in the KSA. In the opinion of J(Prof2), Twitter provides an inaccurate image of Saudi society. This is potentially problematic when, according to W(Prof2), other societies "have started to judge Saudi society through its hashtags".

5.4.8 Theme 9: Disadvantages of Twitter Usage

5.4.8.1 Populism in CJ Practice

Some interviewees indicated that one of the disadvantages of Twitter is its overly 'populist' nature. Some **columnists** face this problem when covering economic issues. Colm6 explained that "the writer goes with the flow to communicate his idea for readers to understand". He mentioned the example of the White Land Tax. Some economic affairs writers agreed that this was the only solution to the housing crisis, even though it was not resolved after these fees were imposed. Colm9 stressed that populism relies on influencing readers without providing any proof; and then, it loses its

⁵²This hashtag, which appeared in 2016, called for Saudi women to be allowed to drive cars.

reliability. As time passes, it is clear to the recipient that the account owner is not trustworthy.

Public figures commented on the negative side of CJ in Twitter, with PF2 noting that it could be criticized for being highly selective reporting that simply provides the writer's personal point of view. PF3 made a similar point, observing that amateur journalists do not always behave professionally because this is a new experience for them. As a result, sometimes Twitter loses credibility and can lead to rumour-mongering. PF2 claimed that some influential tweeters rely on the populist nature of particular issues when posting their material, such as what happened in White Land Tax issue (see Appendix 10 for examples).

From the negative point of view, **professional journalists** from *Al-Watan* argued that CJ had contributed to the practice of "campaign media" and the emergence of so-called populist citizen journalists who tend to cover issues that stir up the emotions of most ordinary citizens. W(Prof1) gave two examples: Abdulhameed Al'Amri's campaign against real-estate speculators⁵³ and Burjus al Burjus who campaigned against selling off part of Aramco on the grounds that it would pose a danger for future generations.⁵⁴ *Al-Watan* interviewees thought Twitter facilitated "populist journalism" which touches on the issues affecting ordinary citizens or "civic journalism" which focuses on situations and problems involving citizens and does not belong to certain institutions. They also observe that CJ issues are "populist" in nature, touching on those issues that affect citizens more than traditional journalism does.

⁵³ Abdulhameed Al Amri tweeted about fraud and manipulation of real estate companies. He writes about economic affairs for *Al Eqtisadiyah newspaper*, has many Twitter followers and is active on social media regarding economic issues.

⁵⁴ Burjus al Burjus was previously a strategic planning expert at Aramco. He writes on Economic Affairs for *Al Watan* and is active on social media. He tweeted about plans to sell off part of Aramco due to the economic crisis.

5.4.8.2 The Ignorance of Officials in Dealing with New Media

Exaggeration in media statements from some Saudi officials has placed them in awkward positions with recipients of their messages. This has led to mistrust in officials and in any information provided by these media outlets. Twitter has contributed to criticizing these statements which cause media excitement and fail to provide any useful information.

Colm1 recounted a story indicating an official's lack of knowledge of the media reports issued periodically by his ministry. Colm1 indicated that when someone in an official position refers to sensitive issues such as poverty, he needs to do so in an accurate and objective manner. He must also rely on official information when discussing such issues.

Colm1 mentioned that in 2010-2011 he had tweeted about the poverty rate in the KSA. He was then invited to attend a meeting with the Minister of Social Affairs at the time, Yousef Al Uthaymeen. The Minister explained that the figures included in the tweet were incorrect and asked where the information had come from. Colm1 answered: "From the ministry report." It then became clear to Colm1 that Al Uthaymeen had not read the report. The Minister then asked his deputy if Colm1's figures were correct and came from the annual report. The deputy did not know either. Colm1 was shocked to discover that neither the minister nor his deputy minister had read the annual report issued by their own Ministry about an extremely serious issue affecting Saudi society.

Colm1 noted that whenever he discusses a potentially sensitive issue, he follows the regulations in effect in the KSA and depends only on information issued officially. So, if the issue is Saudi, he must rely on information issued by the official authorities.

5.4.8.3 Hashtag Misinformation Campaigns from Outside the KSA

Interviewees confirmed that accuracy and reliability are of key importance when dealing with hashtags; some claimed that certain hashtags have become a tool in the hands of the KSA's foreign enemies aimed at inciting problems in Saudi society.

Some **columnists** believe that the public may have been influenced by misinformation campaigns from outside the KSA. Colm8 claimed that 60% of Twitter content for the KSA originates from external sources aiming to disrupt security who are supported by rival powers such as Iran, or from SM companies that rely on these exaggerations to increase their number of followers. The **public figures** interviewed also thought that not all hashtags are intended to represent the best interests of the Saudi audience. They pointed to the fact that Twitter potentially provides a platform for starting rumours, defamation and unwarranted personal attacks on some officials. It can also be used to promote and incite terrorism in the KSA. Foreign organizations can use Twitter to threaten security and spread strife inside Saudi society with some accounts having been blocked due to their links to terrorist acts inside the KSA and to their support from other organizations. PF1 gave the example of #Removing_the_guardianship_system as a hashtag that had contributed to rumour-mongering.⁵⁵

Professional journalists agreed on the need to take precautions when dealing with information published on Twitter and to determine the credibility of this, pointing to errors made by well-known newspapers in material about Royal Decrees in 2016. *Okaz* and *Al Madinah* were heavily criticised for publishing the news of the dismissal of Abdullah bin Musa'ed, the Head of Youth and Sports Agency, on their official Twitter accounts without confirming this. *Al-Eqtisadiyah* also published incorrect facts about sales of Aramco shares which led to them to face legal questioning. Interviewees from *Okaz* also mentioned the circulation of incorrect news on Twitter which created a black market for cigarettes.⁵⁶ *Al-Yaum* journalists noted with concern the leaking of official documents on Twitter.

⁵⁵ This hashtag was trending for a while. It mainly concerned removing the male guardianship system and asked for the right of Saudi women to be treated as adults who do not need to have a male guardian.

⁵⁶ This was prompted by "rumours" about a proposed rise in cigarette prices due to the economic crisis.



Figure 0.5: Screenshots of tweets from *Al-Madinah* and *Okaz* incorrectly announcing the dismissal of Abdullah bin Musa'ed posted on the Royal Decrees hashtag.

5.5 Conclusion

All interviewees agreed that Twitter exercises a powerful influence within Saudi society but they also highlighted both the positive and negative aspects of this influence. All those interviewed thought that CJ has an effect on Saudi society and has a role to play there in the absence of a real role for professional journalism. It is logical, with this absence, that the public would show an interest in CJ, which uses Twitter as its platform. Due to its features and characteristics, Twitter has contributed to allowing citizen journalists to present their content and interact with recipients. However, there was debate about the means by which citizen journalists can publish their content. The professional journalists' sample maintained that the use of Twitter has distorted content due to competition among citizen journalists on providing leading news. This has made Twitter a platform for rumours and fake news. It should be noted that most professional journalists in the KSA are not specialized in the field of journalism and do not hold degrees in journalism or economics. However, they practise journalism nonetheless. It has highlighted the role of CJ in the KSA by increasing economic awareness among citizens. This is shown in the impact of CJ in Saudi society, for example, the role of CJ in the White Lands Tax imposed in 2015. They also provided suggestions about how to improve CJ in the KSA in the future.

Chapter Six: Analysis of Twitter Data

6.1 Introduction

The sample from which the Twitter data is drawn focuses on the official Royal Decrees hashtags for 2015 and 2016 (#Royal_Decrees_2015 and #Royal_Decrees_2016) together with two other hashtags relating to economic issues highlighted during the same period (#White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed and #Saudi_Vision_2030). The researcher selected a period of one day (i.e. 24 hours) for each hashtag, and then exported the Twitter data produced for each hashtag over that time to DiscoverText⁵⁷ software. Due to the huge amount of Twitter data for each hashtag, the researcher systematically selected a 10% sample to ensure this was reasonably representative of the dataset. The software clustered the data by content, and subsequently the researcher manually extracted content not considered relevant to the hashtags' issues. Next, each tweet in the hashtag sample was given an identifier to facilitate thematic analysis. Given that the language used in the tweet sample from these hashtags was mainly Arabic, thematic analysis was conducted manually. This process is explained in more detail below.

6.2 #Royal_Decrees_Sample

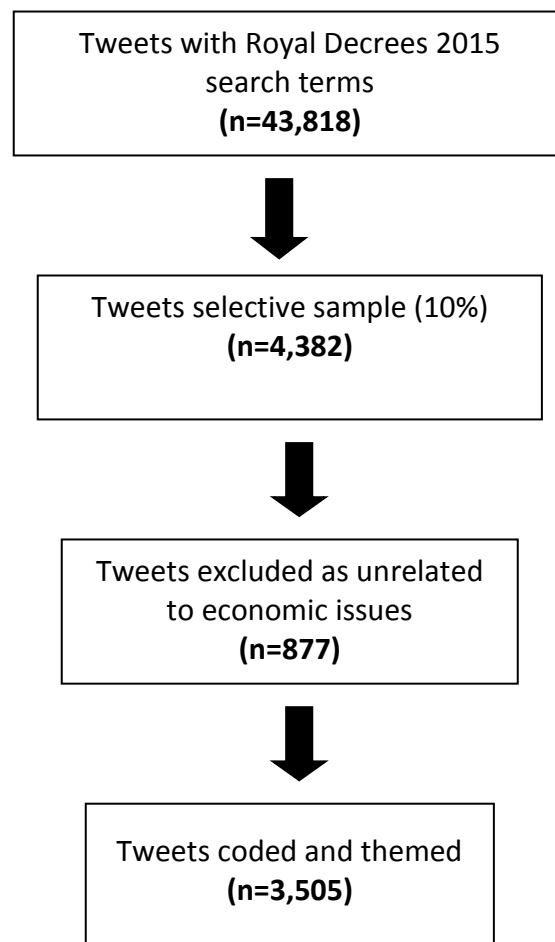
6.2.1 #Royal_Decrees_2015

This hashtag was analysed for the 24-hour period 21.30 on 29 January 2015 to 21.30 30 January 2015, some six days after King Salman's coronation. The hashtag consisted of a total of 43,818 tweets. A 10% systematic sample

⁵⁷ DiscoverText can be used to analyse data such as tweets occurring on particular hashtags. Created by Textifter, this software tool enables researchers to filter data, detect duplication, and search collaboratively. It also supports human coding and machine learning. Using DiscoverText measurement techniques, text data can be reliably classified, and the accuracy (and thus validity) of individual and aggregate human observations can be improved (see <https://textifter.com>)

of these was extracted to produce a dataset of 4,382 tweets; all containing the keywords #royal decrees 2015 and economic reform issues. The data was then cleaned and some 877 tweets were removed as their content included topics not judged to be directly concerned with Royal Decrees and outside the scope of this analysis. These tweets included prayers irrelevant to themes analysed here, advertisements and pornography. This left a total number of tweets for the hashtag study sample of 3,505 (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 0.1: #Royal_Decrees_2015 sample



Each tweet sample was then analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively to produce a thematic map of the principal topics included in the hashtag and tables that highlighted themes with tweet frequency (see 0 for further details). The six themes which emerged for #Royal_Decrees_2015 are listed in Table 6.1.

Table 0.1: Themes of #Royal_Decrees_2015

Themes of #Royal_Decrees_2015	Frequency	Percentage
Thanking King Salman for economic decisions in 2015	1094	32%
Prayers for King Abdullah Bin Abdel Aziz	1028	29%
News content	528	15%
Royal Decrees 2015 represent Saudi PI issues	497	14%
Modernisation of the KSA	290	9%
Reliability of official media vs. CJ	68	1%

6.2.2 #Royal_Decrees_2016 Sample

Data retrieval from #Royal_Decrees_2016 began at 24.00 on September 27 2016 and ended at 12.00 on September 28 2016. The total number of tweets in this sample was 6183. A 10% systematic sample was extracted, resulting in a sample of 619 tweets. Following data cleaning, 51 irrelevant tweets were eliminated, as their content involved issues not within the scope of the analysis such as advertising, pornography or personal appeals for help with health treatment or debts for re-tweeting. This gave a final sample for analysis in this hashtag of 568 tweets (see Figure 6.2 below).

As previously, each tweet sample was then analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively to produce a thematic map of the principal topics included in the hashtag and tables that highlighted themes with tweet frequency (see 0 for further details). The five themes which emerged for #Royal_Decrees_2016 are listed in Table 6.2 (see below).

Figure 0.2: #Royal_Decrees_2016

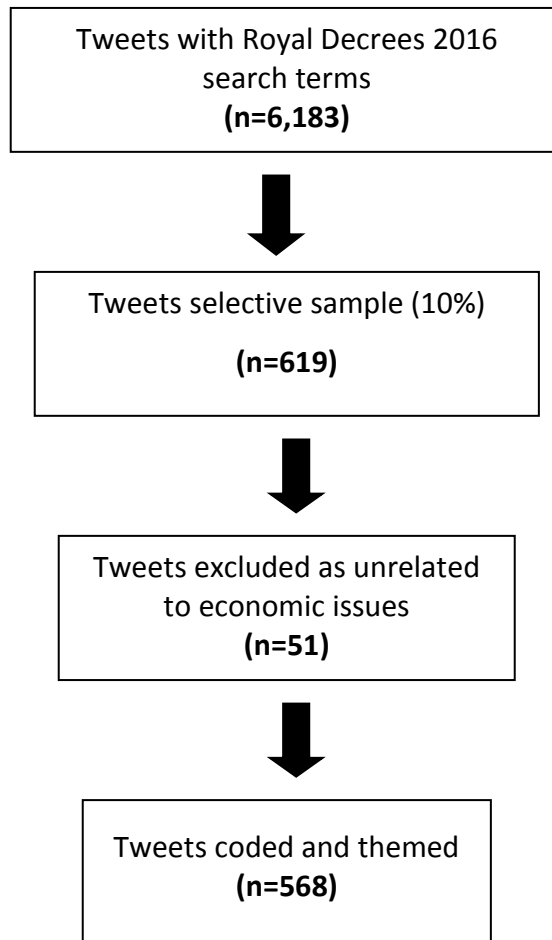


Table 0.2: Themes for #Royal_Decrees_2016

Themes of #Royal_Decrees_2016	Frequency	Percentage
Patriotic tweets supporting the Royal Decrees	285	50.2%
People pay for government failure	144	25.3%
Interactivity with citizen journalists	100	17.6%
Suggestions for dealing with Royal Decrees 2016	25	4.4%
News content	14	2.5%

6.2.3 Royal Decrees as a Public Interest Issue for Saudis

6.2.3.1 #Royal_Decrees_2015

Royal Decrees can be considered to be a matter of public interest (PI) as they affect Saudi citizens' daily social and political lives. The issue that created most interaction on this hashtag was the payment of a two-month salary bonus to government employees. By the end of 2015, the number of public sector employees had reached 1.52 million, according to the Saudi

General Authority of Statistics, with public sector jobs forming some 72% of jobs in the KSA (Arabia, 2016).

The phrase 'All you can hear is hush, hush' was repeated 25 times, implying the need to pay close attention due to the importance of the matter. T2480 tweeted that the thing you could hear most during the speech was 'hush, hush' with T2087 making a similar comment, both users emphasising the interest in King Salman's speech. T609 tweeted "Hush, hush, he's started talking", requesting silence for the start of the King's speech.

The phrase "the situation of the Saudi people" was repeated 200 times and users posted various images to indicate their interest in the event. T206 tweeted an image of a mobile phone without a sim card indicating the user did not want to be disturbed by any calls during King Salman's speech. Another image showed a group of young men paying close attention to something on television and another group watching Channel 1 and raising their hands in prayer, hoping for good news (T1099). Another user posted an image of a crowd watching a large screen in a park with the caption: "The Saudi people now". It is also clear that some of the Saudi youth in the image are wearing traditional Saudi clothing, suggesting they were so keen to watch they that they did not even stop to change out of their formal dress. Images featuring two children wearing large glasses and watching television (T709) and a father watching television with his children, captioned "The Saudi people right now" (T2018) suggested the importance of the matter to all members of the family. It was noticeable that all the images featured viewers sitting very close to the television screen, watching with rapt attention. T641 posted an image of many eyes, also indicating the importance of following the event.

The phrase "The Saudi nation awaits the issuance of the Royal Decrees" was repeated 160 times and when it appeared on the account @SaudiNews50 (T1870) it received 602 re-tweets, 70 likes and 70 interactions, i.e. comments. Each tweet is accompanied by the number of times it was liked and re-tweeted and how many comments it received enabling these totals to be calculated. T908 expressed similar sentiments: "Breaking news. The Saudi nation is awaiting the Royal Decrees" as did the

most viewed account @Thetopvideos⁵⁸ (T1817). Levels of activity on Twitter show that the subject of Royal Decrees is of immense interest to Saudis, and that social media allow them to voice these in a way that the traditional Saudi media system does not. This relationship became evident when Saudi citizens criticised the official television channel, Channel 1, on #Royal_Decrees_2015.

The hashtag included 112 tweets referring to the fact that Saudi citizens only watch state-owned television channels when Royal Decrees are being broadcast. This shows that the official television channel does not meet the interests of Saudi citizens and therefore only attracts a small number of viewers.

The account @FctCO⁵⁹ (T1811) tweeted that, at those times (i.e. when the Royal Decrees are being announced), Saudi Channel 1 attracted the largest numbers of viewers since King Fahd's⁶⁰ death in 2005. This post received 1016 re-tweets, 144 likes and 51 interactions.

Tweeters also exchanged the direct link for this channel, a further indication that Saudi citizens do not regularly view this at home. For example, the sportswriter Abel Aziz Al Mriseul @ALMRISEUL commented: "For those who wish to watch #Channel_1 to follow #Royal_Decrees but do not have a TV, this is the link". His tweet received 400 re-tweets, 119 likes and 95 interactions. A further 36 users tweeted a link to Channel 1's live stream. Similarly, 22 other users tweeted the channel's frequency for those who had removed it, with T1046 sarcastically adding: "I know you removed the channel a long time ago." Many replies joked about viewing figures before and after the Royal Decrees broadcast. For example, T357 commented: "The number of viewers of Channel 1 right now is 30 million. A few minutes ago it was three old men". T377 tweeted: "People are asking about the frequency for Saudi Channel. They've all removed [it]" followed by

⁵⁸ @Thetopvideos posts the videos that have been viewed most by Twitter users.

⁵⁹ This Twitter user posts facts and information.

⁶⁰ Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz bin Abdurrahman bin Faisal bin Turki Al Saud (1921-2005) was the fifth king of the KSA.

a laughing face emoticon. Three other tweeters referred to the effect of this massive increase in viewers on the Channel 1 presenter. T87 joked: “The host is shy. It’s the first time this many people have watched him”. Another tweeter responded: “He’s not used to people watching him” while T700 thought the Channel 1 presenter would be feeling ‘nervous’ because “Suddenly, the whole nation is watching Channel 1. [...] He’s not used to anyone watching him.” The word ‘suddenly’ emphasises that the Saudi people are not used to watching this channel. T879 said that King Salman’s most important achievement since coming to power has been making people watch Channel 1. T909 also joked about Channel 1’s presenters, tweeting that they were “in trouble. They’ve all gone to get a shave!! They didn’t expect that the whole of the KSA was going to watch them today.” This humorous comment also indicates the expected surge in the usual viewing figures for Channel 1.

T648 posted an image of a crowded train, explaining “The Saudi nation is watching Channel 1”, referring to the importance of the event. Another 10 tweeters asked: “When did Channel 1’s logo change?” implying that they had not watched the channel in a long time. After King Salman’s broadcast, a similar number tweeted “We’ll see you again on the eve of Ramadan,” a reference to the fact that Saudi citizens usually only watch state television when Royal Decrees are announced or when the start of the holy month of Ramadan is officially declared.⁶¹

6.2.3.2 #Royal_Decrees_2016

Data from this hashtag shows that the Royal Decrees of 2016 were of real interest to the Saudi public. Users searching for further information about financial issues posed numerous questions to citizen journalists on a range of economic topics, suggesting that Saudis relied on them to answer queries about the economic crisis instead of turning to the officials responsible.

⁶¹ According to *Shari’ah*, the timing of Ramadan is based on the lunar calendar. As this month of fasting approaches, appointed specialists monitor when the new moon is expected. The official announcement declaring the start of Ramadan is made by the religious authorities but only appears on Channel 1 in the KSA.

There was a high level of interaction with these posts, 100 tweets in total ranging from questions to criticism of government decisions. The criticism of these decisions and their interaction with experts on economic matters also indicates that Saudi citizens have become used to the openly critical tweets sent by these citizen journalists.

T78 posted a video in which he posed the same question as an article written by citizen journalist, Al Zamel, on January 22 2015: Would the Saudi government reach the stage where it was unable to pay its employees' salaries? The user referred to figures in Al Zamel's article that showed that the state needed 300 billion Riyals to cover the cost of these salaries and how much oil it would need to sell to provide this. Al Zamel raised the possibility of the government having to borrow from local or international banks if it was unable to cover these costs. When the tweet was posted to Al Zamel, it was re-tweeted 963 times, received 960 likes and 61 interactions. User interactions varied. Some tweets included prayers to God to be merciful to the KSA and its people while others heavily criticised Al Zamel's tweet, arguing that the KSA would overcome this economic crisis and would not experience the problem that he speculated about. T88 posted another article that Al Zamel had published in his blog nine months before the Decrees were issued in which he predicted the transformation of the KSA from a revenue-based country to a productive one (see Appendix 11).

Many questions concerning government decisions were also directed to Burjus Al Burjus. T309 asked if the cancelled annual allowance was likely to be reinstated in 2017 with T310 responding that this needed to be clarified by an official with accurate information from reliable sources. Another user, T318, wanted to know if the change from the Islamic calendar to the Gregorian one for salary payment methods would also affect the validity of personal documents such as driving licenses and ID cards. T320 posted a question to the Ministry of Labour and the Recruitment Committee⁶² asking whether salaries for domestic assistants would also be reduced. T322 maintained that the 2016 Royal Decrees would have larger, more complex

⁶² This is a private business that works as a recruitment agency for Saudi citizens wanting to hire domestic assistance, for example, housemaids, drivers, cleaners etc.

effects on the Saudi economy than small-scale analyses by economists could predict. He argued that they did not understand the wording of the Decrees and that statements and explanations from government officials were needed concerning the details and scope of the cuts. He added that according to these economists, it would naturally follow that the prices of goods would go down as this is a basic rule of economics. This user specifically mentioned Burjus Al Burjus as one of the economists being referred to and noted that he is a follower (see Appendix 10).

The citizen journalist and public figure Khalid Al Alkami also criticized the 2016 Royal Decrees. Under the title “Words of truth”, T314 tweeted that Saudis would not be convinced by cutting benefits and allowances to support Sisi,⁶³ Lebanon and others, adding: “We are in the middle of a crisis and we hope that everyone will pull together: princes first, then ordinary citizens”. He also complained in his tweet that during his interview about *Vision 2030*, Prince Mohammed bin Salman (hereafter, MbS) had promised more support for those on low incomes but this had not been forthcoming to date (see Appendix 11).

T301 re-tweeted posts by citizen journalists such as Fadel Al Boainain concerning the fact that salaries represent the largest of the budget items, putting pressure on incomes. He also referred to Al Zamel’s tweets about the Decrees, which he described as very painful and significantly affecting living standards; but a necessary evil, nonetheless. He also quoted Al Zamel’s opinions that the continued fall of oil prices had exacerbated the deficit and depleted foreign reserves, both of which safeguard the stability of the Riyal, and also that the KSA had failed to build a productive economy, meaning that any decisions to be taken following these austerity measures would have a negative impact. Financial expert, Mohammed Al Sawaid, tweeted that government measures would affect real estate prices outside

⁶³ Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil el-Sisi is the sixth and current president of the Arab Republic of Egypt and Supreme Commander of its Armed Forces. He was elected in 2014 for four years in office.

urban areas, possibly causing a fall in property prices in areas without utilities (see Appendix 11).

It is noticeable that citizen journalists did not provide answers to these user queries since the Decrees needed explanation from officials rather than speculation by economists. Thus, if someone tweeted a specific question which was related to a point of law, an economics expert would not be in a position to respond, other than to point out that this lay outside their area of expertise. Problems might arise if a follower acted on any advice given and Saudi legislation is also often deliberately vague and requires expert interpretation.

6.2.4 Patriotic Tweets Supporting the Royal Decrees

6.2.4.1 #Royal_Decrees_2015

Tweeters expressed their gratitude to King Salman. Sheikh Dr. Aed Al Qarni's prayer for King Salman: "May Allah grant him more faith and kindness" received 2345 re-tweets, 682 likes and 87 interactions. His later verse: "You have brought joy to your people with your economic decisions and reassured them about their future" obtained 3614 re-tweets, 1537 likes and 155 interactions. Another prayer for King Salman was offered by Dr. Sami Al Hammoud who tweeted: "May Allah bring joy to his heart as he has brought joy to [ours]". The tweet by @3ajel_news that the monarch would "bring happiness and comfort to the Saudi people and that his #Royal_Decrees were widely welcomed" was re-tweeted 514 times.

Issam Al Zamil's tweet that the Royal Decrees would bring hope was re-tweeted 366 times, gaining 51 likes and 40 interactions. This post was followed up by questions about the impact of these Decrees on economic conditions, with T2053 asking whether the government's subsidy of electricity bills for certain areas would affect real estate prices and land speculation. Al Zamil replied that he did not think it would have any noticeable effect.

In total 1094 tweets thanked the monarch for his Decrees. T700's message: "Thank you Servant of the Two Holy Shrines. Thank you, our

King. Thank you. Thank you” received 506 re-tweets. Praise for King Salman’s actions also came from T909: “May Allah bring with these Decrees good things for us and for our nation. May He lead our King to all goodness and may He vouch safe for us the blessings of security and prosperity”. This tweet received 260 re-tweets and 48 likes. T4381 prayed for the King, tweeting: “May Allah grant you a long life”. Badr Al Rajhi’s post referring to the Royal Decrees as a sign of the monarch’s “generosity to his people” obtained 288 re-tweets, 40 likes and 17 interactions.

Other users offered prayers for King Salman following the Royal Decrees. T2087’s post: “May Allah bring joy to the heart of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and increase his wealth” was re-tweeted 492 times. The Royal Decrees were also variously described as “historic”, “blessed” and “very great”, showing “goodness and generosity” and “kindness” or were simply referred to as “good news”. For T223 these positive qualities were reflected in the new Cabinet appointments and the decision to improve housing and provide bonuses for Saudi citizens. Some 64 users tweeted the same prayer of gratitude: “May Allah make these decisions a good omen for us all and guide our King to all that is good and righteous”.

Some 1028 of the tweets on the hashtag included prayers for the late King Abdullah, the first ruler to order the bonus payment of a two-month salary to all government employees when he ascended the throne in 2005. T599 posted an image of the late monarch, adding: “Amid these joyful Royal Decrees, there is a man who always made us happy. Do not forget him in your prayers” and received 309 re-tweets, 41 likes and 17 interactions. T212’s comment addressed King Abdullah directly: “You, the most precious person in the nation’s heart, are in Allah’s. May you rest in peace” and his post received 287 re-tweets, 34 likes and 9 interactions. King Abdullah’s own request “Do not forget to pray for me” was also circulated among tweeters with 25 users incorporating these words into their own posts: “In the midst of your happiness at the Royal Decrees, do not forget the one who said in his will: ‘Do not forget to pray for me’. May Allah have mercy on him and forgive him”.

6.2.4.2 #Royal_Decrees_2016

Some tweets included praise for King Salman's decision to cut salaries, considering the monarch's actions to be patriotic and urged citizens to stand by the nation. Patriotic tweets totalled 285 and expressions such as "I will sacrifice my soul and my money for my country" (T65) and "We stand by our country in good times and bad and obey and follow our King in peace and war" (T98) were repeated. Tweets also included warnings against enemies who were trying to harm the state (T76).

T209 tweeted: "We stand by our nation and its leaders in good times and bad. We must not believe rumours aimed at distracting people and spreading confusion among them". In a similar vein, T201 commented: "We obey and follow in good times and bad, in war and peace. This is what our beloved prophet told us. I, myself, consider my sacrifice a holy jihad against those who hate the Land of the Two Mosques". Tweeting on the same hashtag T212 wrote: "The country did not spare us its help in times of prosperity. Now, in times of hardship, citizens must accept the Decrees and support their country. This hardship will not last, God willing".

T105 tweeted: "These Decrees mean that the country needs our help. We must stand by it and not allow these Decrees to provide a good opportunity for those who seek to topple us and our government". T58 stated: "We stand by our country in good times and bad. We shall not follow those who mean harm to our country, we shall not listen to them and become hypocrites" while T84 cautioned: "Beware of discussing these issues in a negative way in front of children and denigrating the country. Such words could become fixed in their minds for the rest of their lives". On the same theme, T96 wrote: "A country cannot be your country only in the good times! Real patriotism is when you stand by and support your country at times of crisis."

T94 posted an image of a Saudi soldier and a citizen holding hands with the caption: "Security is everyone's responsibility. We stand by our country and obey our leaders and their Royal Decrees".

T28 commented specifically on the cuts to allowances, observing: "Better to lose an allowance than to lose a country. This should be our

motto” and continued: “The country's enemies do not want to see it stable and they exploit and exaggerate any decisions made”. T32 tweeted: “Maybe this will be for the good” while T91 stressed: “We are not worthy of living in a country we do not protect”, indicating the importance of defending one's homeland and not allowing enemies⁶⁴ to post tweets on the hashtag, spreading disunity and discord among the Saudi people. Meanwhile, T23 tweeted a picture of King Salman with the caption: “We obey the Royal Decrees”, indicating national unity between the people and their ruler. T72 replied: “May you stay powerful, O nation! Your people will be with you in good times and bad.” T29 expressed the opinion that it was very reassuring “to see that the people stand by their government. Paid users with seditious anti-KSA accounts did not make the headlines”. T44 stressed that “These Decrees represented the best choice for the future of our country and our children during the economic crisis, until the Saudi economy revives”. T69 criticised tweeters that questioned the Royal Decrees observing: “They claim to love their country but are the first to challenge the King's decisions”.

T444 posted a Snapchat image of an article published in the *Sunday Times* in 1993 together with an Arabic translation of its content. It mentions that the KSA, with its great oil reserves and legendary wealth, is heading towards bankruptcy which will have disturbing implications for the Western world. The user concluded that the KSA survived that crisis and would survive this one with God's help and the right long-term strategy. This post was re-tweeted 27 times, received 13 likes and 5 interactions. T67 was also optimistic, observing: “This is a crisis we will overcome. Our country is going through bad times and we must stand by it”.

A post by T43 was re-tweeted by 54 users. This consisted of an image including patriotic expressions that suggested that all citizens should show allegiance to their country in good times and bad. The image included phrases highlighting the KSA's problems such as the war in Yemen, internal terrorism, the Iranian threat, criticism from the western media and the fall in oil prices and T43 reassured Twitter users that despite all these crises, the

⁶⁴ Iran, Qatar and Yemen. Some Saudi political figures have also sought refuge in other countries such as UK or USA.

KSA remains secure and urged them not to support any foreign attempts to make use of these crises to spread conflict. He concluded by commenting: “We obey Allah, His Prophet and our Guardian [the monarch]”.

T65 also stressed the importance of standing by the state by referring to the Saudi army in the south as defending the country and defeating the enemy. He called on all Saudi citizens to do likewise by showing unity and allegiance in following these Decrees and offering prayers, on the basis that the values of real men are revealed in such situations. T60 stayed with the same patriotic theme, stating: “We were with you in times of prosperity, O motherland. We will stick by our country, its leaders and its people in times of hardship over prosperity”. T85 tweeted: “We support the country's most important interests. This country's security is above everything else”. T15 referred to the Decrees as a kind of disaster facing Saudi citizens, commenting that in times of despair, real nationalism is revealed. He added that users should not support the KSA’s enemies posting on the hashtag under false names, aiming to cause discord between citizens and their government.

T38, a member of Saudi royalty, also said: “The state stood by us in prosperity and gave us everything. We reaped the rewards during the good times and now we must stand by the state in this time of hardship”. This received 1405 re-tweets, 476 likes and 1269 interactions. Some users criticized T38, calling for allowances paid to the royal family to be stopped. For example, T27 tweeted: “You, who receive millions in allowances, are the ones who should stand by the state” while T24 posted:” Do you know what hardship is? You people spend all of your vacations in France!”

A number of other users posted verses from the Quran and Hadith, urging Saudis to thank God in good times and bad and to pray for the Guardian [monarch] and obey him. Some 55 tweets carried religious content of this kind. For example, Sheikh Aed Al Qarni wrote: “May God bless us by preserving the safety and security of this land, making us speak with one voice and guiding its leaders to all that He loves and accepts”, generating 1553 re-tweets, 954 likes and 76 interactions, all of which offered prayers for the country's security and loyalty to the King.

T421 referred to a video by an Islamic preacher in which he mentions a *hadith* that stressed that a believer's livelihood is guaranteed by the Creator. He concluded his tweet with the phrase "Praise be to God!" indicating his belief in fate. T54 also mentioned the following Prophetic *hadith*: "If anyone among you is secure in mind in his life, healthy in body and has food for today, it is as though the whole world has been brought into his possession".

A fatwa (an advisory opinion by a Saudi mufti) was also exchanged, warning people against rumour-mongering following the 2016 Royal Decrees. T74 tweeted a fatwa from Sheikh Al Fozan emphasizing the importance of safety and security for mankind as they were "more important than food and water". However, T26 noted that: "Religious discourse is only used when the decision to rob citizens is issued", a sentiment that was repeated 24 times by different users.

6.2.5 A New Era: Modernization of the KSA

6.2.5.1 #Royal_Decrees_2015

Tweets in the hashtag also focused on King Salman's new Cabinet with ministerial appointments being in their thirties, something which is unusual in the KSA. Verbs like 'formatting' and 'modernizing' were repeated as was the phrase "a new era", implying that the KSA was witnessing change following King Salman's coronation in 2015.⁶⁵

Some 290 tweets expressed the opinion that these Royal Decrees would trigger a process of modernization in the KSA. T2002 referred to the KSA as undergoing a process of formatting, using this metaphor to describe the radical change taking place in the country since the start of King Salman's rule. The same tweeter explained: "The Kingdom is being modernized".

⁶⁵ At the time of writing, numerous social changes have taken place including Saudi women being allowed to drive and the opening of cinemas in 2017. These have also had economic benefits since women can now access work opportunities further away from home and do not have to pay for drivers. Similarly, the opening of cinemas has provided employment, lowering unemployment rates.

This same phrase “The Kingdom is being modernized” was tweeted by another 160 users. Some tweets included the phrase “LOADING 60%” implying that massive change is taking place that has not been experienced previously and they expressed their feelings about this by adding a smiley face emoticon. The phrase “King Salman has carried out a format of the KSA” was repeated by 80 users with another 15 tweeting “King Salman has formatted everything in the Kingdom”, indicating the major change taking place during his rule. Some 35 other users also picked up on a similar theme, commenting “The KSA is starting a new era in its history” or “A new era. We ask Allah for success”. In addition, the tweet “King Salman is renewing the Kingdom; the KSA is being modernized” appeared eight times and “The KSA is being updated” seven times.

Comments were also made about the inclusion in King Salman’s Royal Decrees of a new phrase in relation to Saudi Cabinet appointments rather than the previous euphemism commonly used by King Abdullah: “He was dismissed upon his request”. T767 tweeted that: “These ministerial posts require trustworthiness and are not honorary implying that those occupying these positions need to demonstrate honesty and devotion to duty”. This was also thought to indicate the monarch’s stricter approach, that entailed dismissing anyone whose performance fell short, regardless of his position.⁶⁶

6.2.5.2 #Royal_Decrees_2016

The entire range of media regulation issues, from privacy and media intrusion through to general matters concerning the relationship between the state and the media can be classed as public interest issues. Having identified issues deemed to be in the public interest, some Saudi citizens want to voice their opinions about them and believe that they are able to express those opinions more freely on social media than in the Saudi press.

⁶⁶ In 2017 there were numerous examples of this new approach including the dismissal of Mohammed bin Nayef (Minister of the Interior) and Prince Miteb bin Abdullah (Minister of the National Guard), both of whom are from the ruling family. The wording used stated that these dismissals had taken place for reasons considered to be justified by King Salman.

6.2.5.2.1 The People Pay for Government Failure

The hashtag sample also included some 144 tweets expressing users' resentment about the Royal Decrees. The phrase 'the people pay for government failure' was repeated 35 times in the sample and it was noticeable that the same phrase was repeated by various users within a very short period of time, indicating that the warnings about accounts being used against the KSA are credible. Tweets by Saed Al Faqih, a Saudi opposition politician living in London, were exchanged, highlighting his opinion on the Royal Decrees, namely, that the country is living in a real crisis. Instead of countering the corruption of princes, citizens are bearing the cost. The Saudi radio and television presenter, Khadija Al Wa'el, tweeted in support of the KSA, commenting: "To those who are laughing, tomorrow you will see that we live in a great country" and attached the Saudi flag to her post. This indicates that the hashtag included attacks on and mocking of the 2016 Royal Decrees (see Appendix).

Some tweets criticized the Royal Decrees, claiming *Vision 2030* was the reason for the cuts to Saudi citizens' allowances. Criticizing the McKinsey company⁶⁷ which was thought to have created *Vision 2030*, T15 asked: "Will they be able to stop the country from being dependent on oil by cutting citizens' salaries and imposing taxes?" He stressed in another tweet: "Instead of starting with the pockets of the poor, it would be wise to begin with the pockets of the billionaires who benefit undeservedly". This received 364 re-tweets, 170 likes and 22 interactions. This idea was reiterated by T270: "It is clear that *Vision 2030* is based on cutting government spending and subsidies and raising taxes" and T270 concluded: "People were happy with *Vision 2030* but are now sad". T511 noted that one of the objectives of *Vision 2030* is "to get rid of poverty, not to get rid of the poor". T503 pointed out that "Every day *Vision 2030* proves it will only take money from citizens' pockets" (see Appendix 12).

⁶⁷ This pioneering company is famous for its consultancy and distinguished academic studies. It provides consultant solutions to companies and governments alike. (<https://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/moving-saudi-arabias-economy-beyond-oil>)

T66 observed critically that “Whenever there is a financial surplus, the rich benefit the most and whenever there is a financial crisis, the poor are the only ones to suffer”. Some users complained that any critical description of the Royal Decrees should be viewed as unpatriotic but T98 responded: “Silencing criticism in the name of patience is not a religious or a logical approach”. T45 also commented: “Some people expect nationalism and demand patience”. and suggested that austerity measures should begin at the top referring specifically to the Royal Family and government ministers. T87 tweeted: “If those with fortunes would distribute their money in times of prosperity, the deficit would end”. He concluded his tweet by describing this as “a patriotic act”, adding “Join citizens in their patriotism, your Highness”. T33 observed: “You must change the draining of the budget by the upper class, not citizens” and urged users: “Contribute to the country's development, do not be its enemy”. T504 expressed similar sentiments, tweeting: “The austerity phase must include everyone” (see Appendix 11).

The Royal Decrees were described by some as “austerity measures” while others suggested they should be named “We-will-bankrupt-you measures”. Some, such as T34, described the state of the Saudi people following the Royal Decrees with the phrase “Strangers in surplus, partners in deficit”, ironically commenting on the differences between sectors of Saudi society. T503 linked internal and external policy by commenting that the war on Yemen began as Operation Decisive Storm⁶⁸ and ended with Operation Reductions Storm. It appears that those who participated in tweets under the name #Reductions_Storm were from Yemen due to their user names which all included the word 'Yemen' or a Yemeni flag in them, or from the tweets' locations (see Appendix 11).

Some called for a halt to the financial allowances paid to members of the Royal Family.⁶⁹ The writer, Al Uhaidib⁷⁰, also criticized tweets by

⁶⁸The name given by the KSA to the first stage of its military-led intervention in Yemen (25 March-21 April 2015) to defend its lands in the south.

⁶⁹ Members of the Royal Family receive monthly payments varying in accordance with the proximity of their lineage to the founder of the Kingdom, King Abdel Aziz.

⁷⁰ A journalist and literary critic who publishes *Okaz* newspaper.

religious writers and preachers following the Royal Decrees that attempted to offer reassurance to citizens with a Quranic verse or Hadith, concluding his tweet by adding that: “For them the country revolves around issues relating to the cinema and women”.⁷¹ The implication was that they were not concerned about issues such as the livelihood of ordinary citizens. His tweet received 1070 re-tweets, 224 likes and 68 interactions (see Appendix 11).

T83 described the day the Decrees were issued as “black Monday”. Four other users called for the formation of a council like a parliament to represent people’s interests. Previously this was also demanded by members of #HASM⁷² and led to their arrest (see Appendix 11).

A group referred to as the yes-men⁷³ was also criticized. For example, T437 said that people are stunned by the yes-men and hypocrites and how they allow others to violate their rights. T52 maintained that: “A good citizen pays twice. He pays the price for corruption and the price to correct what was corrupted a long time ago”. T321 stressed that claiming to be the only patriotic person during these times of crisis was deeply dishonest: “If you are affluent and talk about patriotism, remember that others have children and have been badly affected by these Decrees. Either say something good or shut up”. This was retweeted 78 times. T12 added: “How come ordinary

⁷¹ At the time of writing there were major debates about the opening of cinemas in the KSA and allowing women to drive.

⁷² The Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association was established by eleven human rights activists and academics in 2009. It is a Saudi NGO aimed at spreading awareness about human rights based on the International Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. On 9 March 2013, the criminal court in Riyadh ordered HASM to be put on trial, the association closed and its property confiscated with immediate effect. The HASM trial (known as the Trial of the Academics in Saudi media) involved the two founders, Dr. Mohammed Fahd Al Qahtani and Dr. Abdullah Al Hamed. After initially being tried separately (Al Hamed on 11 June 2012 and Al Qahtani on 18 June 2012), both cases were integrated. After hearings concluded on 29 December, Judge Hammad Al Omar issued a verdict on 9 March 2013, imposing 10 years’ imprisonment for Al Qahtani and 11 for Al Hamed. The verdict also prevented them from travelling for the same period of time after their release, liquidated HASM and confiscated its property.

⁷³ The Arabic term is used to refer to people who support all decisions made by their superiors, whether right or wrong. Their role is only to praise authority figures in media outlets, and to accuse any critics of national treason.

people end up paying for the mistakes? Correcting errors that have been committed is a waste of public money”.

6.2.5.2.2 Suggestions About Dealing with the Financial Cuts Caused by the 2016 Royal Decrees

A total of 25 tweets were posted that included solutions to the austerity measures that appeared in the Royal Decrees. T16 posted an infographic explaining how to manage family expenses and advice on how to save money. T309 stated that the Royal Decrees were “intended to achieve a balanced Saudi economy during a critical period facing the region in the form of wars and conspiracies in the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular.” This was stressed by T502 who posted an image depicting the situation in the KSA, noting that it was a part of a global economic crisis and the result of falling oil prices. He added: “We need economic reforms and the near future will provide positive results from these Decrees”, concluding: “We can lose an allowance but we must not lose our country”. T312 posted a suggestion by King Salman to look at the effect of cuts on military personnel salaries as this sector would be greatly affected by the cancelling of annual benefits and allowances. T508 suggested there was need for a press conference to explain the goals of the Royal Decrees so that “evil-minded individuals are not given the chance to influence citizens and steer them against their country”. The role of Saudi media was restricted to releasing prepared statements when the Royal Decrees on financial cuts were issued. Therefore, officials needed to clarify their impact on the lives of Saudi citizens.

A famous quotation from King Faisal⁷⁴ —“We are a people who are satisfied with dates and milk”— was exchanged, indicating the Saudi people’s ability to survive the current financial crisis and adapt to difficult conditions. Saudi writer, Dr. Ahmed Al Arfaj, posted a video providing helpful money-saving tips such as making lists of daily and monthly expenses and

⁷⁴The third king of modern the KSA and the third son of King Abdel Aziz; who assumed power on November 2 1964 and died on March 25 1975.

mentioning an article he wrote about this in *Al Riyadh* on 23 September 2016. When users' daily calendars were exchanged on the day the Royal Decrees were issued, they appeared with advice saying "Wealth comes from saving", urging Saudi citizens to start saving to adapt to the economic crisis.

6.2.6 News Tweets about the Royal Decrees

Social media generally involves dynamic interactive media combining text, sound and image as their multimedia content. Technology has played an important role in making this kind of media interactive, allowing users to interact with, read and comment on the citizen journalism practised on platforms such as Twitter. This technology has created a type of new media that differs greatly from its traditional predecessor in terms of interaction and the speed of transfer of news and in providing live images and allowing citizens to react to them. In important emergency circumstances and global events, these networks can interact with news around the clock and report on these events and the place they have occurred, under most circumstances.

6.2.6.1 #Royal_Decrees_2015

Some 528 tweets focused on details relating to the Royal Decrees. Of these, 147 tweets were concerned with the two-month payment for some Saudi citizens announced by King Salman. A tweet by @AjelNews24⁷⁵ account received 2735 re-tweets, 302 likes and 153 interactions. The @HashKSA⁷⁶ account received 1820 re-tweets, 172 likes and 302 interactions while @SaudiNews50⁷⁷ tweet received 1071 re-tweets, 100 likes and 55 interactions. The news content of the tweets from these accounts was concerned with the bonus payment of a two-month salary to government employees. It was evident that the number of interactions varied according

⁷⁵@AjelNews24 is a Twitter user who specialises in posting breaking news in the KSA

⁷⁶ A Twitter user who focuses on items on the Trends hashtag in the KSA

⁷⁷ A Twitter user who posts news relating to the KSA.

to the news content, as @SaudiNews50 account's tweet concerning the establishment of the Council for Economic Affairs received a total of 166 re-tweets, 21 likes and six interactions on this topic. This is only to be expected since the payment of the two-month salary bonus was top of the priorities for the large numbers affected (see Appendix 9).

Tweeters expressed their positive feelings about this topic in different ways. For example, Saudi journalist Salah al Gheedan mentioned that "as a result of this payment, government employees did not need to fear rising prices. As long as we have Tawfiq Al Rabe'a among us". Al Rabe'a was the Minister of Trade at the time and had made concerted efforts to raise awareness about consumer issues among Saudis, informing them about any manipulation in the prices of goods.⁷⁸

Another journalist, Fahd Al Seneidi, tweeted that he would spend his bonus on his family "starting with his beloved precious mother, his wife and his children" and received 1434 re-tweets, 210 likes and 202 interactions.

News content concerning ministerial appointments to the Cabinet also received some interest but amounts of responses varied. The new ministerial appointments received 291 news tweets. When @AjeINews24 announced the appointment of Dr. Azzam Al Dakheel as Minister of Education, this received 2137 re-tweets, 160 likes and 90 interactions while there was less interest in the appointment of Sheikh Dr. Saed Al Shethri as an advisor to the Royal Court with 1823 re-tweets, 111 likes and 45 interactions. These interactions took place through the @AjeINews24 account.

Some 90 news tweets dealt with the remaining decrees. News about the replacement of the Supreme Economic Council by the Council for Economic Affairs and Development received least reaction. When Issam Al Zamel tweeted about this issue, he generated 42 re-tweets, 17 likes and 9 interactions. He also tweeted about the decision to approve 20 billion Riyals

⁷⁸ In the KSA, it has been the custom to give a bonus to all Government employees to celebrate the coronation of a new King. Often, the day after, the prices of common commodities are raised. The Minister of Trade tries to ensure that this does not happen.

to implement electricity and water projects for the housing grants plan, mentioning this was an important decision. News tweeted by *Al Arabiya's* account concerning the establishment of the new council only received 16 re-tweets, 8 likes and 4 interactions.

This shows that news about the payment of a two-month salary bonus for government employees, thanking King Salman and praying for the late King Abdullah for being the first Saudi ruler to pay this two-month salary to government employees on ascending to the throne, were the topics that generated highest interaction as a result of the Royal Decrees in 2015.

6.2.6.2 #Royal_Decrees_2016

Both Saudi newspapers and electronic news websites interacted with the Decrees and published news about them, using infographics and videos (some 14 tweets in total). The press and television channels took different approaches in their coverage of the Royal Decrees. For example, MBC News provided exclusive coverage explaining the allowances and benefits to be deducted from state employees, analysing the amount for each allowance and how much this saved from the state budget. Al Madina news website tweeted an infographic showing the best ways to save money and cut spending. *Middle East* newspaper posted an info-graphic detailing all the amendments, reductions and cancellations of financial allowances, benefits and bonuses for state employees in the 2016 Royal Decrees.

Twitter reflects the interests of the Saudi public in its comments and the hashtags that appear directly following a Royal Decree or relating to issues that directly impact on citizens' economic life. Regarding the impact of CJ on Saudi society, respondents replied that the biggest impact has been upon Saudi youth, as they are the largest group who interact on Twitter. CJ allows them absolute freedom and their rapid response to events is part of leading on news stories.

6.3 Hashtags on Economic Issues

6.3.1 #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed Sample

The hashtag was analysed in the 24-hour period following the issuance of this Royal Decree, to be precise, 00:45:00 GMT November 23 2015 until 00:45:00 GMT November 24 2015. Containing the keywords #white lands tax #fees. During this time, it produced 3773 tweets after all advertisements and unrelated content had been excluded (see Figure 6.3 below). Table 6.3 shows the seven themes for #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed. Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show the results of a sub-theme analysis by positive and negative responses respectively.

Figure 0.3: #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed

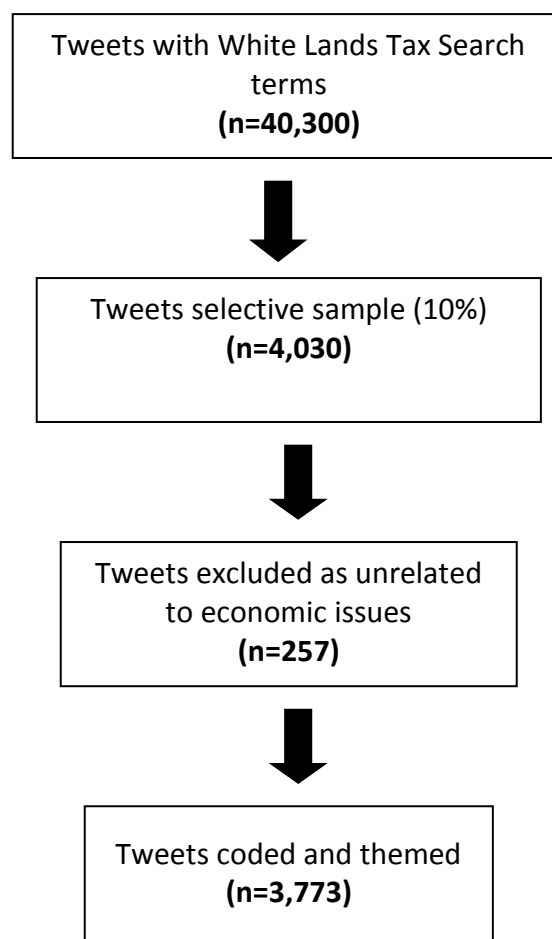


Table 0.3: Themes for #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed

Themes of #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed	Frequency	Percentage
Informative content	850	23%
Positive content on White Lands Tax	1232	33%
News content	587	16%
Freedom to criticize White Lands Tax on Twitter	273	7%
The role of citizen journalists	196	5%
<i>Monopoly</i> YouTube film	45	1%
Ideological discussion about White Lands Tax	40	1%
Twitter revolution	550	14%

Table 0.4: Sub-themes of positive content regarding White Lands Tax

Sub-Themes: Positive content on #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed	Frequency	Percentage
Thanking King Salman and government for imposing tax	312	25%
Praising decision	257	21%
Seen as solution to housing crisis	243	20%
Congratulations on this decision	236	19%
End of the age of monopoly	184	15%

Table 0.5: Sub-themes of negative content regarding White Lands Tax

Sub-Themes: Negative content on #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed	Frequency	Percentage
Citizen land monopolists e.g. Prince Mishaal	197	72%
Doubts about implementation of tax	76	28%

6.3.2 #Saudi_Vision_2030 sample

Data from the #Saudi_vision_2030 hashtag was retrieved from 24.00 GMT on April 25 2016 to 24.00 GMT on April 26 2016. It generated 250,000 tweets containing the keywords #vision 2030, #Mohammed Bin Salman and #Saudi vision. It was analysed by retrieving a systematic sample of 10% (25,000 tweets), which was still a very large number of tweets. For the purposes of comparison, one previous study was based on 9,000 tweets from total of 1.1 million tweets, making this a 1% sample size from the population (Riff et al., 2014) (see Figure 6.4 below). A list of the twelve themes for this hashtag is shown in Table 6.6 (below).

Figure 0.4: #Saudi_Vision_2030

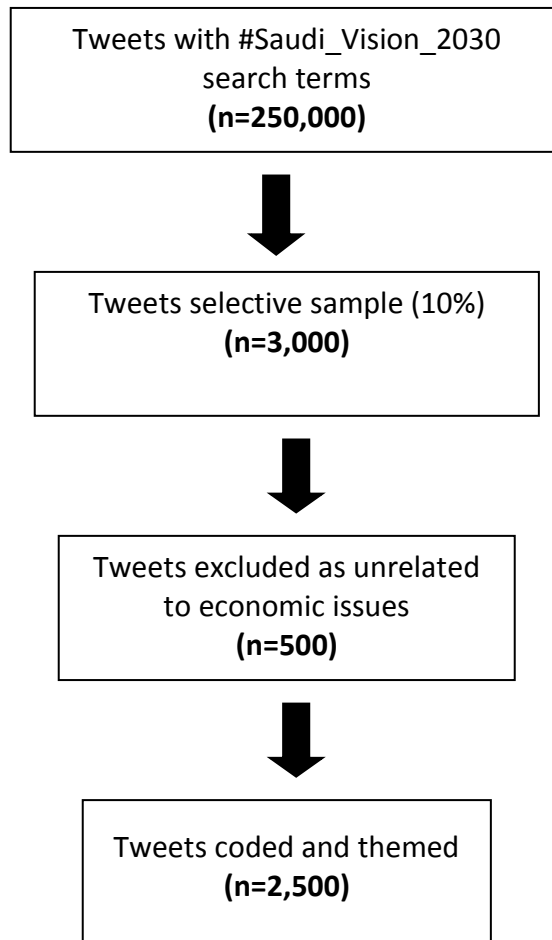


Table 0.6: Themes of #Saudi_Vision_2030

Themes of #Saudi_Vision_2030	Frequency	Percentage
Informative content	375	15%
Mohammed bin Salman	325	13%
Citizen journalists and <i>Vision 2030</i>	300	12%
Optimism towards <i>Vision 2030</i>	250	10%
Transparency of <i>Vision 2030</i>	200	8%
Saudis observe, Saudis judge	200	8%
The end of the age of oil	200	8%
News content	150	6%
Prayers for success in achieving <i>Vision 2030</i>	150	6%
Historical evidence to support <i>Vision 2030</i>	125	5%
Local reaction	125	5%
International reaction	100	4%

6.4 Thematic Analysis of Saudi Tweets Related to Economic Issues

As a result of the economic crisis the Saudi government launched its economic plan known as *Vision 2030* which caused intense media debate, especially on social media platforms like Twitter. It has become clear that reaction to *Vision 2030* and to the White Lands Tax has helped to create a social movement and an interactive virtual community which engages in dialogue, exchange of ideas, and commentary, using various means of communication. This analysis shows the relationship between Saudi citizen journalism as expressed through Twitter and the Saudi public interest in relation to economic matters, drawing on analysis of hashtags in Twitter in the KSA.

6.4.1 Role of Citizen Journalists in Raising Awareness About Economic Issues: #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed

Citizen journalists specializing in economic affairs interacted extensively with this announcement, which was covered widely on Twitter in the form of charts and infographics. Other applications were also used such as Snapchat shots which were uploaded to YouTube. Citizen journalists also answered queries that Saudi citizens had about the announcement, with tweets expressing the views of citizen journalists on White Lands' Tax comprising some 35% of the total number of tweets. Some of these examples are described below.

Economics writer Abdel Hamid Al Omari received 4,272 re-tweets, 907 likes and 769 interactions on his personal Twitter account. His tweets included a photograph of the Cabinet's decision to impose the White Lands Tax, with some of the key points in the announcement underlined in red accompanied by the comment "Congratulations to all Saudis". In a number of tweets he explained what this meant and the type of land to which it would apply. He also added some of the basic regulations to be enacted when the system came into operation and the impact of this on the Saudi real estate market and housing crisis, drawing on statistics he had published in an

article in *Al Eqtisadiyah*. He also tweeted about his forthcoming television interviews talking about the tax and its effect on the lives of Saudi citizens (see Appendix 12)

Fahd Al Qassim, an economics activist and public figure on Twitter, tweeted a link to an article he wrote about the new Decree only one hour after it was issued, entitled “Twenty facts about the executive regulations for White Lands’ Tax”. This received 103 re-tweets, 91 likes and generated considerable interaction. He mentioned that the last three lines of the article were the essence of the subject. Some users asked who had to pay this tax while others commented that it was more important to take action rather than issuing laws and regulations. One user expressed surprise at Al Qassim’s quick response to the event, as his article was published less than one hour after the Decree was issued. Al Qassim also posted links to television interviews in which he talked about the Decree (see Appendices 10 and 12).

Khalid Al Alkami, another economics activist on Twitter, tweeted about the Decree and described land speculation in the KSA as “the greatest crime committed against the nation and its citizens”. He described the Decree as economic reform and tweeted in the same hashtag that “these speculators have stolen the country’s lands and the citizens’ dreams”. His post received 564 re-tweets, 113 likes and 50 interactions. In one tweet, he responded to questions from many users about whether the tax would apply to all without exceptions and concluded by saying: “You heard it here first”, implying that he uses his account as a source of news for the public (see Appendices 10 and 12).

Issam Al Zamel, an economics writer, tweeted: “Breaking News: the Cabinet agrees to the White Lands’ Tax project and sets 180 days to prepare the executive regulations. Congratulations to all”. His comment received 1458 re-tweets, 178 likes and 167 interactions, and was followed up with more tweets explaining the implementation mechanism, the main features of the system approved by the Cabinet and the level of tax to be imposed. He responded to citizens’ questions about how long it would take to solve the housing crisis. When some followers questioned whether the Decree would apply to land speculators such as princes and ministers, he

confirmed that it would apply to all. Others asked about the types of lands included in the Decree in large cities such as Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam. When Al Zamel referred to the Decree as “historic”, stressing that it would play a role in solving the housing crisis for Saudi citizens, his post received 698 re-tweets, 91 likes and 114 interactions. Some 800 users retweeted Zamel’s references to his television appearances, his Snapchat account videos and his tweets on the Decree. T74 praised Al Zamel’s Snapchat account for explaining how to benefit from the Tax Decree. Al Zamel also tweeted links to videos explaining the Decree from an economic point of view that he had posted on his Snapchat account and uploaded to YouTube (see Appendices 10 and 12).

The content of the Decree was covered in various ways, engaging many users. Economist Rashid Al Fozan tweeted about the Decree, stating that further details about its implementation would be posted on his Snapchat account.

A series of 30 tweets by Burjus Al Burjus, another economic affairs writer, explained how the Decree would be implemented and addressed land speculators. One of these stating: “It is shameful for land owners to avoid paying tax on land they acquired for free!” was re-tweeted by 271 followers, received 392 likes and 40 interactions. Another 70 users re-tweeted about his participation in television programmes dealing with the Decree (see Appendices 10 and 12).

The White Lands’ Tax hashtag also included 400 questions about the Decree and many citizen journalists’ accounts were mentioned as a useful source of information (see Appendix 10).

Economic affairs experts interacted through their accounts with the *Vision 2030* hashtag, providing an economic perspective on the plan. They also took part in television programmes, providing their opinions about the plan, posted links to their articles about it and provided critical analyses of its core themes.

Issam al Zamel highlighted that the most important part of the plan was increasing the rate of non-oil exports from 16% to 50% of the total non-oil GDP. His tweet received 399 re-tweets, 44 likes and 148 interactions. In

another tweet, he argued that: “The real challenge is not to set objectives but to achieve them, especially increasing exports, and we hope all resources will be utilized to achieve this”. He added: “If this goal is to be achieved, it will be the most important element in transforming a revenue-generating economy into a productive one. The rest of the objectives will be achieved as a result”.

Users reacted to these tweets. T19 asked Al Zamel whether it would be better for the KSA to turn to investment as the main alternative to oil, given that the Kingdom has no industrial capabilities. Al Zamel responded: “It would be impossible for investments to provide sufficient for everyone”, indicating the KSA’s dependence on oil to pay state employees’ salaries. Another user T37 asked: “Will manufacturing basic products be enough or do we need to manufacture products at the rate of industrial countries?” adding: “We are talking about something that would bring in millions of people and provide full citizenship rights”. Al Zamel’s answer was: “We do not have to bring in millions of people. There are many industrial countries with small populations such as Finland, Switzerland and others”. Given his specialization as an economist, Al Zamel concentrated on the issue of non-oil exports and the change from a revenue-based economy to a productive one.

Abdul Hamid Al Omari announced his television interview about *Vision 2030* on the *Al Thameena* programme on MBC satellite channel and also tweeted: “I would be honoured if you could follow me on *Ya Hala* programme on the Gulf Rotana channel if you have time”. Users later reacted to the content of his interview and his ideas on the plan. T1708 described Al Omari as offering “Good criticism of *Vision 2030*: better than listening to the never-ending praise and lies on other channels. Thank you very much”. T99 also praised Al Omari: “Thank you. Since the announcement of *Vision 2030*, I and many people I know wanted to hear serious discussion of housing, like you delivered”. T611 asked: “When you voiced our ambitions and hopes that the state income will flourish from non-oil sources when *Vision 2030* is implemented, did he [Prince Mohammed] respond to your questions specifically about the housing crisis?” This reference indicates that Saudi users see Twitter as a means of

communication between the government and citizen journalists who then convey this information to the public.

Al Qassim criticized how ministries are run in the KSA, tweeting: “I do not believe that *Vision 2030* will be achieved while we continue to run our government ministries with half-ministers. Our ministers for health, education and agriculture are over-worked”. Here he is referring to the fact that some Saudi ministers have other duties in addition to their ministerial ones and are, therefore, exhausted and unable to carry out these duties efficiently.

Burjus Al Burjus tweeted: “Given the challenges and options, opportunities and dangers, *Vision 2030* will not fail because of our criticism nor succeed as a result of our praise. It will only succeed if it provides the right ingredients for success” and concluded by praying for the plan’s success. This received 516 re-tweets, 145 likes and 333 interactions. He also used Twitter to promote his appearance on television talking about the plan and the issue of national transformation. Users responded to another tweet in which he noted: “The details of the transformation program will probably be announced within a few months”. When Saudi female presenter, Mona AbuSulayman, asked: “Months?” he answered: “Yes, a few months”. She then replied to him in English: “They said tomorrow”. He responded also in English: “Tomorrow is to lay out the vision. That’s what the title says. The detailed plan will follow”.⁷⁹

Economic affairs writer, Mohammed Al Swaid, replied to another tweet that suggested it should be possible to create a pioneering program

⁷⁹It is worth explaining briefly why these individuals tweeted in English. Mona AbuSulayman is co-host of one of MBCTV’s most popular social affairs programs, *Kalam Nawaem* (Softly Spoken). In 2004, she was named a Young Leader by the World Economic Forum and in August 2013, she was appointed as Global Ambassador for Silatech. As a media personality, she has spoken and written about social issues, women rights, community development, media, and building bridges between East and West. She has a Masters degree in English Literature, and is currently completing her Ph.D. in Arab-American Literature at King Saud University and chooses to tweet in English (Bureau, 2011). The citizen journalist Al Burjus worked at Aramco (formerly the Arabian-American Oil Company) where most employees are American and all workers must speak English fluently. Thus, Al Burjus was able to reply to AbuSulayman in English. This demonstrates that some citizen journalists can interact with users in different languages; and interactions on Saudi Twitter are sometimes conducted in languages other than Arabic, which is the official language in the KSA.

involving the creation of software that would provide translation of the Quran to benefit the Islamic world and be worthy of the land in which this divine message was revealed. He commented: “Do not hesitate to give your suggestions to the Economic and Development Council. They are in need of everyone’s interaction to build our future”. Al Swaid also publicized his upcoming critical review of *Vision 2030* on SnapChat and tweeted the whole text of *Vision 2030* (some 41 pages in total) in pdf format. Another tweet contained a link to his *Al Riyadh* article in which offered his considered thoughts on the plan. Here Al Swaid highlights the fact that he had written an article that included many parts of *Vision 2030* before it was even announced, noting in another tweet: “Honestly, it is as if I had written *Vision 2030* myself, without exaggeration. You cannot imagine how surprised I was”.

Meanwhile, Khalid Al Alkami tweeted: “For *Vision 2030* to succeed, it must be supported by a political reform program founded on the participation of citizens in decision-making and control of public funds and state apparatuses”. His tweet received 775 re-tweets, 190 likes and 51 interactions. He added that the implementation process for the plan needed to be managed professionally by means of company strategies not governmental apparatuses and that “There was no place for personal considerations when it concerned the future of a nation”. He also tweeted that “For *Vision 2030* to succeed, we must rely on technocrats and the young and we must eliminate favouritism and the old guard: survival of the fittest”. He added that corruption must be eliminated and that grants, allocations, greed, gifts and all sorts of financial inefficiency⁸⁰ needed to be stopped. This received 839 re-tweets, 84 likes and 160 interactions. These tweets demonstrate why Al Alkami does not write for the local media as many of his articles are blocked from publication by editors. Using his Twitter account gives him far greater scope for freedom of expression and direct criticism (see Appendix 12).

⁸⁰ ‘Allocations’ here refers to money paid to the Royal Family. Greed means the money granted by the Royal Family to certain groups close to it. Grants are government lands given to certain groups especially in the form of bribery by businessmen and the rich.

This research focused on identifying the role of citizen journalists with a special interest in issues of economic reform in Saudi society, those who operate within the new interactive media environment using Twitter. It evaluates the importance of this phenomenon and the reasons for its emergence and current popularity, as well as identifying the specific characteristics of CJ in the KSA. Special attention is paid to Twitter as a means of interaction between citizen journalists and Saudi citizens for discussion of economic issues using this new media platform, and to the extent to which citizen journalists using Twitter shape Saudi public interest with regard to economic affairs.

6.4.2 Saudi Tweeters' Reactions to Economic Issues Perceived to be of Public Interest: #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed

Twitter has become a part of everyday life for Saudis wishing to gain up-to-date information about economic issues, express opinions about them, show support for or oppose economic initiatives related to Royal Decrees, or to simply read the views of economists and other users on a topic.

User reactions to the Decree varied. The vast majority of tweets were supportive of it and optimistic about its implementation, but 20% voiced their opposition or pessimism. Expressions of thanks and praise were repeated 569 times and 312 users extended their gratitude to King Salman, to his heir Mohammed bin Nayef and to Prince MbS (see Appendix 10).

Four-fifths of users referred to the Decree in positive terms, calling it a "historic decision" or "step". One user described it as "an important reform" and others saw it as an economic development that would benefit the country. T190 mentioned that it was "a historic night that the Kingdom never dreamed would come" and ended his tweet by thanking King Salman. T3700 said that it was "a historic economic decision that will change the future of our economy". T204 called it "a decisive day in the history of the KSA" while T316 described it as "the solution to the greatest problem in the country's history". T4013 referred to it as "a lethal blow to land traders and the greedy". Others expressed their optimism about the Decree's ability to boost development and the economy. For T932, it was "an excellent decision and

history will remember King Salman” while T3509 named it “the best decision of 2015”.

It was believed that the Decree would offer a solution to the housing crisis and lead to a fall in property prices. T329 thought it would contribute to a fall in land prices, while T409 tweeted that it would “reap double benefits” as it was “supporting the economy and reducing land prices”. T944 argued that the Decree would help citizens find homes.

Users were positive that the Decree would mean the end of the age of land ownership monopoly with land owners being labelled negatively as: “traders in soil”, “land thieves”, “land merchants”, “land speculators” and “land barons”. T108 stated that today marked “the end of the age of monopoly”, with others using the term “land mafia”. T2099 tweeted “*Bye bye to monopoly*”.⁸¹ Other users stressed that the most important part of the Decree would be its implementation. A comment by the cleric Al Kalbani⁸² to this effect received 1408 re-tweets, 191 likes and 135 interactions (see Appendix 10).

6.4.3 Ideological discussions on #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed

The hashtag also prompted ideological discussions about the political and social aspects of the Decree, creating debate among various schools of thought in Saudi society. This online interactivity indicates that this can be considered one of the public interest issues which were discussed on Twitter.

⁸¹This phrase ‘bye bye’ was an Arabic transliteration of the English expression. Due to Western influences, the younger generation often resorts to mixing languages in this way in informal conversations including chatting online.

⁸²Sheikh Adel bin Salem bin Said Al Kalbani is imam of the King Khalid Mosque in Riyadh, and was appointed to lead prayers during Ramadan 2008 at the Holy Mosque in Mecca which is considered a major honour.

The hashtag included a discussion between a user aboShla5libraly representing the liberals and Dr. Abdel Aziz Al Rayyes,⁸³ a cleric representing the conservatives. The debate began when aboShla5libraly quoted a *fatwa* issued by Al Rayyes that prohibited the imposition of land tax on the grounds it was contrary to Islamic law. Commenting on the *fatwa*, aboShla5libraly addressed Al Rayyes directly: “Abdel Aziz, you said in the past that the levying of land tax is prohibited. Now that a tax is to be imposed, does the *fatwa* remain?”

Users interacted with him, posting images of tweets by other clergymen such as Sheikh Awad Al Qarni holding similar views to Al Rayyes and one user (Sultan Al Fifi) asked aboShla5libraly to put the same question to Al Qarni. One user, Fahd Al Twejri (@f_twejry) commented that the *jamiah* (i.e. the conservative Islamists) change their *fatwas* once or twice a day. Another user @turki953 replied sarcastically that the Sheikh was an expert on the older version of Islam and because the question concerned the modern version, he would not be able answer it. A user named Bandar Al Edili (@b_Edili) jokingly commented: “Talk softly and respectfully with the Sheikh... for he is the supervisor of old Islam”.

@alsalem31 added that Al Rayyes was two-faced and that if he was interviewed after the Decree was issued, he would say that it was wise and in accordance with *sharia*. @a_alzaide agreed that he was fickle and Al Edili also wondered what his position would be after the Decree was issued. @x_bassam replied that the *fatwas* that were issued “agreed with anything approved by the state, including the participation of women in the senate, land tax and opening shops at prayer times”. According to @s_alsheriz0 Al Rayyes did not speak in the name of Islam or *sharia* but simply to please certain people in the name of religion. @drakn3 also ridiculed Al Rayyes, commenting that he would claim his account had been hacked by someone.

aboShla5libraly interacted with these users, agreeing with all that they said. He also wondered if on the basis of his land-tax *fatwa*, Al Rayyes

⁸³ The official account of Hon. Sheikh Dr Abdel Aziz bin Rayyes Al Rayyes, General Supervisor of the “Old Islam” network.

would oppose the King and senior Islamic scholars or whether the Decree would become permissible following approval, added a smiley face emoticon. Discussion on this subject continued with references to the accounts of both Al Rayyes and aboShla5libraly. One user commented that some clergymen's *fatwas* changed according to the weather conditions, emphasizing Al Rayyes' inconsistency on certain issues. Tweets from this discussion were also quoted and shared on the hashtag (see Appendix 10).

The Decree also prompted discussion among the poor and the rich in Saudi society. A group of businessmen, who are land speculators and would be affected by the Decree, were attacked by other Saudi citizens. Yazid Al Rajehi, CEO of Mohammed Al Rajehi Investment Company, tweeted against the Decree arguing that it would make land owners raise land prices not cut them. Users reacted to his tweets by posting images of him and commenting negatively on them and referring to his Twitter account and that of his brother, Badr Al Rajehi, one of the largest property owners in the KSA.

Two other Saudi businesses with interests in the real estate market, Badr Al Seidan and Saed Al Tweim, were also mentioned and images of their tweets about the tax and opposition to the Decree were posted. Humorous comments were added such as: "I remembered after the Decree was issued how a person born with a silver spoon in his mouth sees things... attitudes of the rich". The phrase: "You will pay" was repeated 30 times and the question "When will you pay?" appeared 10 times. The accounts of all these property owners were mentioned.

Cartoons and ironic videos about the Decree were also posted (see Appendix 10 for examples).

6.4.4 Interaction with #Saudi_Vision_2030

This topic also prompted wide interactivity on Twitter, suggesting that this was very much at the top of the Saudi people's priorities. Twitter users ranged from government officials, celebrities in fields such as politics, sports, the arts, society and culture, and ordinary citizens. They all expressed their optimism about the plan in various ways. This sense of optimism concerning

Vision 2030 also extended to the Gulf region and the Arab world. Non-Saudi Twitter users described the plan as being full of optimism and hope.

Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum⁸⁴ tweeted as a hashtag follower: “This is a vision full of ambition and hope for the Kingdom and the region and will be implemented by a young leadership that has surprised the world with its achievements”. His comment received 7298 re-tweets, 3298 likes and 236 interactions. He also wrote that he was “Optimistic about this vision which will contribute to a new future for the region by utilizing its energies, resources and youth,” receiving 6408 re-tweets, 3194 likes and 249 interactions.

When Abdullah bin Zayed⁸⁵ described *Vision 2030* as “An enormous step not only for the KSA but for the region as a whole towards greater excellence and achievement”, he received 3821 re-tweets, 1210 likes and 100 interactions. He also tweeted a video segment of the interview, commenting: “Prince Mohammed bin Salman launches *Vision 2030* and brings hope”.

Hamdan bin Mohammed⁸⁶ commented: “A plan reflecting ambition and optimism in a bright Saudi future” and received 1405 re-tweets, 919 likes and 77 interactions. Also, Sheikh Mohammed Al Thani tweeted that the plan represented “the road towards the prosperity and growth of the region”, receiving 1068 re-tweets, 498 likes and 45 interactions. Mohammed Al Ahwazi⁸⁷ praised *Vision 2030* as: “A step forward for the KSA” while Taha Al Turki⁸⁸ stressed his optimism about the plan, describing it as “truly ambitious, a major challenge and a great vision” and congratulated the Saudi people on the plan.

⁸⁴ Vice-president and prime minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and ruler of the emirate of Dubai.

⁸⁵ Foreign Minister of UAE.

⁸⁶ Crown Prince of Dubai and head of its Executive Council; he is the second son of Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

⁸⁷ Iranian journalist and political activist in Ahwaz (southern Iran), known as Ahwaz by the Arab community.

⁸⁸ Consultant to the Prime Minister of Turkey

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and the deputy head of the Emirati armed forces, tweeted: “The words of my brother, MbS, envision the future and contain national and strategic dimensions that will benefit the Kingdom and the region”. He later added: “We wish the Kingdom and its wise leadership the best of luck and success in serving the interests of the Arab and Islamic worlds”.

King Abdullah of Jordan also praised the plan, stating: “I found in the interview with His Highness Prince MbS a bright and brave vision, which will play a great role in developing the KSA” (see Appendix 12).

6.4.4.1 Optimism about Vision 2030

Twitter users from a wide range of social backgrounds expressed optimistic views about *Vision 2030*. Badr Al Asaker’s⁸⁹ tweet about the plan’s core themes and their relationship to the KSA’s strategic geopolitical status in both the Arab and Muslim worlds and future investment for the country received 747 retweets, 404 likes and 131 interactions. Abdullah Al Gthami, a pioneer on the Saudi cultural scene, highlighted core themes from the plan, describing it as: “a vision of youth. The language and aspirations of youth are self-criticism and truthful hopes”. He concluded by thanking Prince MbS and describing him as “a son of the nation worthy of a bright future”, receiving 276 re-tweets, 74 likes and 12 interactions. Eng. Khalid Al Faleh referred to “a journey of prosperity and development that would build a bright future full of growth for the nation’s youth”. His tweet was re-tweeted 255 times, received 126 likes and 39 interactions.

Prince Walid bin Talal⁹⁰ also posted an image of *Vision 2030* captioned “our vision” and commented: “For a prosperous nation and

⁸⁹ A Saudi minister occupying the posts of director of Crown Prince MbS’s office for special affairs, secretary general of King Salman’s Youth Business Award, member of the Board of Directors of the King Salman Center for Youth and an inspirer and promoter of business and leadership initiatives for youth by supporting their participation and helping to make their ideas reality.

⁹⁰ A Saudi businessman considered to be one of the world’s largest investors. In 2004, *Forbes Magazine* listed him as the fourth richest man in the world with a fortune of 21

promising generations”. His tweet received 2992 re-tweets, 5131 likes and 1139 interactions. The Saudi businesswoman Amira Al Tawil also shared her optimism about *Vision 2030*, calling for the government and people to work together to achieve it. T876 said that as a young Saudi man he was not only optimistic about the plan but also felt “secure and content” that it would “raise his status and guarantee his future”. T64 said that “Prince Mohammed’s words have reassured us about our future at all levels and sectors of society”. A famous social media activist in the KSA tweeted about his optimism, commenting: “I believe in the Prince’s support and trust the King and Crown Prince and hope to contribute to the vision’s success”. When singer Rabeh Saqr tweeted: “A good vision for the KSA and its children”, he received 956 re-tweets, 480 likes and 110 interactions.

The Islamic preacher from the KSA, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Fozan, called the plan “a stable and ambitious vision” and ended his tweet by praying for its success, receiving 864 retweets, 284 likes and 33 interactions. Another cleric, Sheikh Aed Al Qarni, expressed his happiness and optimism for “a better future within Islamic *shari’ah*”, his post being re-tweeted 1449 times and receiving 965 likes and 73 interactions.

In his tweet, T234 referred to the plan as not only a renaissance for the Kingdom but for the whole region and justified this by adding: “The KSA is the source of Arab and Islamic cultural strength”. Saudi journalist, Salman Al Dousari, maintained that *Vision 2030* would transform the KSA from regional leader to global competitor while the Saudi football team, Ittihad, tweeted one short phrase: “Towards a promising future” which nonetheless received 1113 re-tweets. Another tweet from T467 on the subject of Prince MbS’s interview described this as unprecedented in Saudi history and thanked him: “because our country has made the best choice and has decided to embrace optimism, achievement and ambition”.

Meanwhile, T56 mentioned that *Vision 2030* required a change of mindset in citizens, because “Suspicion, pessimism, negativity and

billion dollars. In 2009, the American magazine put him at 22 with an estimated wealth of 13.3 billion dollars. By 2010, with 19.4 billion dollars, his ranking improved to 19th. His paternal grandfather was King Abdel Aziz bin Saud, founder of the KSA.

frustration are factors that impede change!”. This tweet received 325 re-tweets, 72 likes and 31 interactions. T940 tweeted: “It is not wrong or unreasonable that after spending years punishing and criticising your country, you are suddenly happy to hear about various development plans such as *Vision 2030*”. Here he indicates that it is important to be objective while criticising your country but once you see plans built on solid foundations, it is not wrong to be happy and optimistic. Here T940 calls for pessimists to be optimistic about *Vision 2030* (see Appendix 12).

6.4.4.2 Prayers for the Success of Vision 2030

Some 400 tweets from all classes of society including clergymen, artists, the elite and ordinary citizens offered prayers for the success of the plan.

Saudi Islamic preacher, Dr. Nawal Al Eid, added that God grants those worshippers who are positively inspired by trust more than they hope for, and was re-tweeted 397 times and received 113 likes. Another Saudi preacher, Dr. Omar Al Miqbil, asked God to make *Vision 2030* a source of good and to bless it: “May He protect the Kingdom and grant it His blessings and raise up the flag of the religion of Islam and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad with the help of [the KSA’s] rulers and people”. The Saudi psychiatrist, Professor Tariq Al Habib, asked for divine assistance to help Saudi scholars, intellectuals and citizens to join hands together in the building process. His tweet received 504 re-tweets and 452 likes. The well-known Saudi footballer Majed Abdullah⁹¹ prayed for success in achieving *Vision 2030* and that it would prove to be beneficial, bringing blessings. His tweet was re-tweeted 2788 times, received 528 likes and 134 interactions.

Other ordinary citizens also offered their prayers. T71 tweeted: “May God bring with these changes good things and blessings for us all”. T808’s tweet offered prayers for the Saudi nation and government: “May *Vision 2030* serve the best interests of all and may God protect the KSA and keep it safe and secure”. T745 also offered prayers for Saudi rulers and hoped that

⁹¹ Abdullah was a striker for Nasr Football Club and captain of the Saudi national team. He is considered to be one of the key players in the history of Saudi football.

the planned changes would be a source of good and blessings. While T81 prayed: “May it offer a good vision for the KSA and its people”, T1092 extended this, praying that *Vision 2030* would succeed and bring good to the KSA and all Muslims (see Appendix 12).

6.5 Freedom of Expression and Criticism on Selected Hashtags

6.5.1 #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed

Some 20% of tweets on this hashtag criticized the major land owners (ministers and princes), especially Prince Mishal bin Abel Aziz⁹² for creating a housing crisis and land scarcity in a country with an area of 2.25 million square metres. Prince Mishal was widely criticized and his photograph was tweeted accompanied by sarcastic comments. This represented the first incident in which a member of the Royal Family was openly criticized on social media. T24 tweeted an image of Prince Mishal with the phrase: “Shut up”, a sarcastic comment implying that the Decree will not be implemented. T2986 also tweeted Mishal’s photo, adding: “This guy has fenced off half the Kingdom’s lands and the state will get millions out of him in taxes”. T958 expressed the hope that the Decree would apply to everyone, especially princes (see Appendix 10).

Some 200 users commented sarcastically about the Decree that those who do not pay their electricity bills will not be expected to pay White Lands’ Tax either. This is a reference to that fact that princes and government ministers are exempted from paying bills meaning that the Decree will not apply to them. T950 called the Decree a farce and asked how someone who has not paid his electricity bills for the last 30 years could be expected to pay land tax. T953 made a similar point, stating that if those who live in palaces do not pay electricity bills, it would be impossible to

⁹²Prince Mishal is the 14th son of King Abdul Aziz, and was Minister of Defense and Aviation and Saudi General Inspector (1951-1956). He then became Prince of the Mecca region (1963-1970) and was head of the Saudi Allegiance Authority until his death on 3 May, 2017. He was popularly known as ‘the king of fences’ referring to the fact he fenced off large areas of land and took possession of these, as is the case for many other princes.

impose a tax on land owners. T3000 also thought that the Decree was nothing more than words as those in power (i.e. land owners such as princes, ministers and judges) are not subject to the law. Some 73 tweets agreed that princes would not pay tax just as they did not pay electricity bills.

A total of 550 users responded to the news about the Decree with the phrase: “We have grown old waiting for this historic moment”; some tweeting the image of the elderly Tunisian man who first said these words.⁹³ This framed the White Lands’ Tax Decree as a revolution that had ended in victory for ordinary Saudi citizens, as reflected in the tweet from T503 stating that 98% of citizens (i.e. the non-elite) had gained from this law. T809 added that it was time for the Twitter revolution on this decision-making site and the law would be implemented (see Appendix 10).

6.5.2 #Saudi_Vision_2030

6.5.2.1 Saudis Observe and Judge

Prince MbS’s interview included expressions which the Saudi people do not normally hear in Saudi politics. Firstly, he emphasised that the rich would not be included in any government support offered to help Saudis face the economic crisis and commented that those who are unhappy about this must be prepared to face the reactions of ordinary Saudi citizens. He added that work was needed to enable the Saudi people to control corruption.

Saudi broadcaster Ali Al Alyani commented on these words of Prince MbS, tweeting: “He who objects shall face the people and the people will judge, the people will observe”, noting that these expressions are unprecedented in Saudi politics. Another presenter, Hammoud Al Fayez, tweeted: “We have made change a part of institutional work” indicating Prince MbS’s desire that Saudi people would participate in his plan, with Saudi youth as its foundation.

⁹³This phrase originated in the Tunisian revolution in 2011. A video went viral on Tunisian, Arab and international television channels and social media showing an elderly Tunisian man named Ahmed Al Hifnawi stroking his white hair and saying: “This is your opportunity, young men of Tunisia. You can give Tunisia what we could not. We have grown old. We have grown old waiting for this historic moment.”

T111 posted a picture of Prince MbS, commenting: “With bin Salman, only the poor will be exalted”, and his phrase was repeated 26 times by other users.

Users also commented on Prince MbS’s promise that low-income citizens should be entitled to governmental support when energy prices rise. T804 commented that these words represent social justice, concluding his tweet with a prayer that this would be implemented in reality. T55 stated that the Prince’s speech offered comfort and made all Saudis proud (see Appendix 12).

6.5.2.2 The end of ‘Addiction to Oil’

The phrase “addiction to oil” was repeated 60 times to highlight the KSA’s over-dependence on oil and its negative impact on the country’s development.

T57 observation that MbS’s leadership marked the dawn of a post-oil era for the KSA received 1040 re-tweets, 610 likes and 112 interactions. For T1095 ending this dependence on oil was a courageous step by Prince MbS. Journalist Salman Al Dousari stressed that the KSA would rid itself of this oil addiction which is not part of the Saudi constitution, indicating optimism in *Vision 2030* which aims to leverage alternative economic sources. T823 commented: “We have become addicted to oil but the KSA was built by men not oil”. @saudiproject repeated Prince MbS’s words that by 2020 Saudis would live without being dependent on oil, meaning that *Vision 2030* would not be affected by the rise or fall of oil prices in the future.

A number of other users expressed their optimism about the KSA’s post-oil economy. T79 directly addressed Prince MbS, urging him to “Depend on God, Mohammed; God and your people are with you for post-oil economic development”. Mustafa Al Agha tweeted Prince MbS’s words about a post-oil dependency KSA. T475 commented that the Prince’s words made good sense, adding: “We have indeed focused on oil and forgotten other good things”. This indicates that Saudi citizens feel confident that in the future the KSA’s economy could depend on sources of income other than oil.

Users also circulated a tweet from the Yemen Now account noting that the KSA had announced its vision for achieving a post-oil economy. This concluded with a prayer wishing “All success to our Saudi brothers”. This message received 54 re-tweets, 50 likes and 5 interactions.

T531 summarized *Vision 2030* as a philosophy of re-mobilization of wealth and concluded his tweet by saying: “If MbS’s vision is supported, he will become a future bin Maktoum”. The reference here is to Sheikh Mohammed bin Maktoum, who was known for his great achievements in developing the city of Dubai. The electronic account for *Sabq* newspaper stressed that there was great optimism about and interest in a post-oil future. One user posted a photograph of Prince MbS accompanied by the Prince’s own words: “The KSA was established without oil. It challenged colonialism with men, not oil. Oil is not something sacred”. The user commented that these words made good sense, reflecting strategic thinking by a thoughtful man (see Appendix 12).

6.5.2.3 References to Transparency

The word ‘transparency’ was repeated 124 times in the tweet sample. Ahmed Al Shuqeiri described Prince MbS’s words as “transparent and expressing hope in a better future”, and received 3929 re-tweets, 4117 likes and 282 interactions. Sheikh Aed Al Qarni also stressed that the interview had been “frank, clear, realistic and ambitious”. His tweet received 1367 re-tweets, 889 likes and 72 interactions. T634 said that transparency was evident in MbS’s awareness of weaknesses and strengths and everyone’s responsibility in implementing *Vision 2030*. The Saudi News account also stressed that transparency would be the first benefit of announcing the flotation of Aramco. This was also stressed by T296, who voiced his optimism about *Vision 2030* and enjoyed the fact that problems were admitted during the discussion.

Twitter users also noted Prince MbS’s admission that too much money was wasted on government buildings, especially air bases which are built like five-star hotels with marble and calligraphy. T42 commented that this represented “a good start to self-criticism” while T187 tweeted: “Very true

words, sorry to say” and offered prayers for the country’s rulers. Dissatisfaction with the government’s performance was reflected in the repetition of the phrase ‘waste of government spending’ (90 times), the word ‘excess’ (21 times) and the phrase “criticism of the performance of the Anti-Corruption Committee” (139 times), These statements, made during the interview, were very warmly welcomed by users, eliciting feelings of transparency, frankness and realism.

Twitter users repeated the Prince’s condemnation of the waste of water and electricity by the rich who consume 10 to 20 times more than average households. The Prince’s opinion that energy subsidies should not go to the rich was repeated 143 times. T302 praised this, commenting: “This is a clear-thinking mind not nonsense talk”.

T266 also stressed that the government’s transparency about *Vision 2030* would contribute to society’s acceptance of change and national transformation. Saudi author, Ahmed Al Arfaj, said that this transparency in proposing *Vision 2030* represented a positive change towards progressive thinking. He ended his tweet by expressing the hope that this change will be accompanied by religious tolerance and social and administrative flexibility. He received 150 re-tweets, 50 likes and 66 interactions. T50 also explained that identifying areas of economic waste and raising awareness of the alternatives outlined in *Vision 2030* involved community participation and is considered #Responsible_Social_Behaviour by the government (see Appendix 12).

6.6 Effect of Twitter on Saudi Decision-Making: #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed

A total of 241 tweets praised the role of social media networks in publicising this Decree. The YouTube film *Monopoly*⁹⁴ is credited with having played a

⁹⁴The film deals with land speculation in the KSA and how this has contributed to soaring land prices. This meant that citizens earning less than 15,000 Riyals per year could not think of buying and owning land or a house. In the film, well-known economics writer and blogger, Issam Al Zamel, called for a land tax (*zakat*) to be levied, stressing that this would be the only means of bringing prices down to a level accessible to Saudi citizens. The film

major role in developing the Decree. Some 45 tweets praised this film for raising awareness on this issue and helping to make the Decree a reality. T407 tweeted that it “began with a film which was followed by a struggle to raise awareness about the issue and ended with a Decree”, adding that the film’s “good scenario” had contributed to non-violent reform.

T504 mentioned that *Monopoly* was the first to raise the subject, making it an issue of public interest. T556 quoted the tweet from Al Zamel’s Twitter account in which he announced the film, commenting that “The story of the struggle began here”. T929 also credited *Monopoly*’s role in ensuring the success of the Decree. It is also worth mentioning that *Monopoly* reached 2,011,018 views on YouTube (see Appendix 10).

A number of tweets on the hashtag referred to accounts of those who has campaigned on this issue including Abdel Hamid Al Omari, Issam Al Zamel, Burjus Al Burjus and Khalid Al Alkami, thanking them for their efforts in raising the issue of White Lands and fighting for the Decree. “Thank you” was repeated 243 times with these individuals being praised 257 times for their efforts.

A total of 236 tweets included photographs of citizen journalists with thanks. One tweeter stated the land tax was “only an idea in 2013” but “became reality in 2015”. T303 thanked these public figures and described them as “fighting for this Decree”. T39 specifically mentioned Issam Al Zamel as having fought for this issue since 2009 with T1053 describing Abdel Hamid Al Omari as “protector of the interests of ordinary people”.

T703 described the Decree as “a victory for the voice of the people” while T904 referred to Twitter as “the Saudi people’s parliament”, highlighting the role it had played in contributing to the Decree and quoting a tweet by Issam Al Zamel in 2013-2014 calling for a land tax. T969 also credited Al Zamel with the issuance of this Decree because he “fought for four years to make [it] a reality”. T957 praised the roles of both Al Zamel and Al Omari.

was shot in a black comedy style typical of the Creative Cinema YouTube channel that produced it.

T901 tweeted that “history will remember Al Omari, Al Zamel and Al Alkami”, described by T915 as “champions of consumer rights fighting for the interests of the country and its citizens against land monopolists” and he asked them to continue their difficult struggle until suitable regulations are issued. T922 called it “a historic day for Al Zamel, Al Omari and Al Alkami”. T2077 reminded users that following the Decree, *Time Magazine* had chosen Issam Al Zamel as personality of the year in 2015 and provided the link to this, congratulating him for this achievement. T98 expressed his gratitude to Twitter for helping to build awareness among citizens and unite opinion against land speculators. T976 noted that in issuing the Decree “the state responded to the will of the people”. T985 emphasised this in his comment: “Twitter heroes speaking for the interests of the nation and its citizens have won the battle” (see Appendix 10).

6.7 References to the KSA’s Past in Relation to *Vision 2030*

A number of users tweeted the text of Prince MbS’s speech commenting on his references to the era of King Abdul Aziz⁹⁵ who challenged British colonialism without oil. This emphasises the KSA’s need to defy the economic crisis without oil. T618 commented that “reminding us of the past is of great importance. A leader can build future plans based on these positions”. T2061 stressed that “King Abdul Aziz’s leadership of the KSA during his reign and his defiance of colonial rule without oil” indicate the Kingdom’s ability to thrive without depending on oil.

Images of King Abdul Aziz and his grandson Prince MbS were posted to stress the similarities between the founder of modern the KSA and his grandson because King Abdul Aziz succeeded in uniting the nation in 1932. This was an exceptional event, given that his family were forced to seek refuge in Kuwait when the second Saudi state fell and he had limited resources at the time. Even so, he was able to restore his rule. Looking to this historical example instead of waiting for the Kingdom to weaken and fall,

⁹⁵ He was the first monarch and founder of modern KSA, the ‘third Saudi state.’ He re-conquered his family’s ancestral home city of Riyadh in 1902, starting three decades of conquests that made him ruler of nearly all of central Arabia.

Crown Prince MbS is trying to save the KSA before it collapses due to the economic and political crisis. He has confronted all the potential problems in one fell swoop which is unusual in Saudi society where change is normally very slow.

T2130 said that *Vision 2030* indicates that the KSA is moving forward with “the steady steps of the grandchild of the founder King Abdul Aziz”. T739 also mentioned the history of King Abdul Aziz and his men in founding the KSA and defying British colonialism without oil. T144 said that during the interview “I saw the features of the founder, the genius of King Salman, the smile of Sultan and the cleverness of Nayef”. He drew attention to the physical resemblance between Prince MbS and King Abdul Aziz and photographs were circulated on the hashtag pointing to this similarity in appearance. The intelligence of King Abdul Aziz⁹⁶ was compared to that of his son, Salman. His smile resembled that of Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz⁹⁷ and his cleverness resembled that of Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz.⁹⁸

User descriptions of *Vision 2030* varied, with some referring to it as a “national transformation”. T2384 expressed his admiration for the plan and mentioned in his tweet that “it is great to be part of this national transformation connecting *Vision 2030* with the nation”. T703 tweeted by saying “we cannot achieve a model for the nation if citizens retain old ways of thinking”. He expressed the opinion that education would form the basis for this change and mentioned that it would be “the fuel for the forthcoming transformation, God willing”. He received 99 re-tweets, 22 likes and 17 interactions. All those who interacted with this tweet stressed the importance of education and gave examples for this. T202 mentioned that South Korea had concentrated on just two ministries to achieve change: education and health. T2497 picked up on the same idea, noting that South Korea and

⁹⁶ First monarch and founder of the modern KSA, the ‘third Saudi state’ (b. January 15 1875; d. November 9 1953)

⁹⁷ Crown Prince of the KSA from 2005 to 2011 (b. January 5 1931; d. October 22 2011).

⁹⁸ Crown Prince of the KSA as well as deputy Prime Minister (2011-2012); he was also Minister of the Interior (1975-2012) (b.1943; d. June 16 2012).

Singapore “do not own oil resources but have brought massive change to their infrastructure”.

A phrase used by Prince MbS, “the year of rapid reform”, was tweeted 50 times, indicating that 2015 would bring rapid reform and 2016 “rapid reform of the system”. As noted in the 2015 hashtags, rapid economic decisions were made during that year but 2016 brought rapid reform based on the strategic objectives included in *Vision 2030* (see Appendix 12).

6.7.1. Mohammed bin Salman

Users on #Saudi_Vision_2030 interacted with Prince MbS’s interview and expressed their gratitude to him describing him variously as “the Prince of the youth”, “the architect of the Saudi economy”, “the brave Prince who believes in risk-taking”, “the king of change” and “the right man at the right time”.

The hashtag also carried tweets expressing gratitude to the Prince for his transparency and for proposing *Vision 2030*. Many were optimistic about a bright future under his leadership. Some 128 tweets expressed praise, gratitude or approval. For example, T1189 commented “Prince MbS’s words are commonsense”. He also posted an emoji of clapping hands in addition to a like. T390 commented “I enjoyed watching the interview” and thanked him for proposing *Vision 2030*. T488 expressed his optimism about Prince MbS’s personality. This was also stressed by T709 who posted Prince MbS’s name with an emoji of two hands signifying gratitude, a green heart and the Saudi flag. The *Ajel News* account also mentioned users who had expressed their gratitude to MbS for announcing a beautiful future and a dream come true with youth capable of creating change.

T106 described the Prince in the following terms: “spontaneous, knows all the details, bold and believes in risk-taking”. T2119 praised him with rhyming verses saying “You are the pride of our religion. You are the whole nation”. T952 added “MbS, you are the right man at the right time”. T520 described him as “the king of change and a symbol of [Saudi] culture, MbS”. T2486 also referred to him as “the architect of the Saudi economy”. He quoted the Prince’s words concerning *Vision 2030* saying “our ambitions

will put an end to housing and unemployment problems”. This indicated that *Vision 2030* is expected to address the most important problems facing the Saudi people. Another user expressed his optimism about Prince MbS commenting “enthusiasm, ambition, a dream, then strong vision will change our reality and create a new era. We are proud of the prince of the youth, he who intends to build”. Another user expressed his admiration for the Prince, calling him “capable”. He posted an image of two green hearts and the Saudi flag. Another user praised the Prince’s ambition which “drives the development machine for the good of the nation and its citizens”. T30 simply tweeted “Bravo MbS”, to express his satisfaction and support for *Vision 2030*.

According to T90 “with MbS Saudi Arabia looks forward to a better tomorrow” while T698 added: “MbS has enlightenment, eloquence and wisdom greatly exceeding his age” and concluded his tweet by asking God to grant him success. T409 added more traits, describing MbS as “wonderful, clear and transparent. He gave clear answers without any ambiguity. I am very optimistic about him”. These sentiments were echoed by the writer, Fahd Al Ahmadi, who stated: “I was impressed with Prince MbS’s words which showed transparency, boldness, openness and a man who is extremely well informed”, noting that this increased Saudis’ trust and belief in national transformation. He received 94 re-tweets and 28 likes. T33 commented “Prince MbS surprised me. He is an exceptional man!” while T2250 added that “Prince MbS’s vision is that of every economist who knows the economic game”.

The Saudi ambassador to Egypt, Ahmed Al Qattan, tweeted that “Prince MbS has studied all of the economic portfolios with care and interest” and commenting on *Vision 2030* he added that Prince MbS “showed during his speech that he is completely informed of the Kingdom’s problems through his communication with experts”.

The Saudi ambassador in Iraq, Thamer Al Sabhan, commented on a picture of Prince MbS with the words “You are the hope of the *Ummah* (Islamic world). May God protect you”.

Saudi journalist, Saleh Al Shihi, stressed in his tweet that “Prince MbS has proved that he understands economic problems showing confidence, determination, ambition and courage” (see Appendix 12).

6.8 News and Informative⁹⁹ Tweets about Economic Issues

6.8.1 #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed_in_the_Saudi_Media

Visual and print media accounts posted under the hashtag only by publishing news about the Decree. Al Arabiya’s breaking news account was most active among users who re-tweeted 700 posts on it, meaning this account received the most interaction of Saudi visual and print media. Local accounts generally received a maximum of 8 to 10 re-tweets except for two reports from *Mecca* newspaper which were re-tweeted 300 times. The first included the fact that the White Lands area equalled that of three countries, while the second featured 11 questions and answers about the White Lands’ Tax Decree. The Saudi News Agency also received re-tweets but less than those for Al Arabiya.

T80 tweeted about *Mecca*’s coverage of the White Lands’ Tax, referring to it as the best because of its use of multimedia. News tweets on the White Lands’ Tax made up 30% of the total with informative tweets making up the other 70% (see Appendix 10).

6.8.2 #Saudi_Vision_2030

6.8.2.1 News Tweets about Vision 2030

The hashtag included news and informative tweets about the plan and its core themes. Al Arabiya received most interaction as it was the satellite channel that originally broadcast the interview with Prince MbS. Its Breaking News account received 1,899 re-tweets, 486 likes and 171 interactions when it announced the time the interview was to be broadcast.

⁹⁹ News tweets consist of short announcements reporting news without providing any explanation or details. Informative tweets provided explanations, examples, statistics, infographics, pictures, videos and detailed accounts which added value to the news item.

Some 145 tweets mentioned the trailer for the television interview, Prince MbS's first. The hashtag also included links to Al Arabiya's live broadcast on YouTube and provided reminders about the interview time and the channel broadcasting it. Accounts ranged from those of journalists to normal citizens. Journalist Khalid Al Eqeili¹⁰⁰ tweeted the link to the channel on YouTube and received 666 re-tweets, 826 likes and 29 interactions indicating gratitude for this reminder and the live broadcast link. Turki Al Dakheel's¹⁰¹ post announcing the time of the interview was re-tweeted 330 times, and received 156 likes and 150 interactions.

T987 also tweeted the same content and posted a link to the live stream of the broadcast, receiving 584 re-tweets, 200 likes and 21 interactions. He tweeted again to remind people that the interview was due to start at 1:30 pm, receiving 454 re-tweets and 32 interactions. The account for the newspaper *Mobtaath* (@MBT3THNEWS) and another account entitled Saudis in Vancouver both tweeted about the interview, emphasising that it was important for Saudi students and expatriates living abroad as well. T94 provided the same content in his tweet about the interview announcement, posting the link for the live stream and noting that this was Prince MbS's first television interview.

This point was reiterated by Turki Al Dakheel in an interview with MBC channel on July 3 2016 in which he stated that Prince MbS's interview about *Vision 2030* had attracted the largest number of television viewers ever in the KSA. He thought this was because large numbers of viewers were looking forward to getting to know more about Prince MbS especially because to date the mastermind of *Vision 2030* who was spear-heading Saudi development plans had not appeared much and rarely said more than he had to (News24, 2016).

¹⁰⁰A Saudi journalist who originally presented programmes and news bulletins for the Saudi news channel; he then moved to Gulf Rotana, a private channel owned by the Saudi businessman, Prince Walid bin Talal.

¹⁰¹A Saudi journalist and director of *Al Arabiya* satellite channel since 2003 and General Manager of Al Arabiya Television News Network in Dubai.

Television channel accounts interacted with the hashtag and posted news tweets about the interview. Tweets on Al Arabiya and MBC Twitter accounts received 420 and 235 re-tweets. BBC Arabic also tweeted on the subject, indicating international interest in the launch of *Vision 2030*.

The hashtag also included tweets from Saudi news website accounts (online news) and the Saudi Press Agency account. When the *Ajel* account tweeted about the content of the interview; the tweet that received the largest interaction was Prince MbS's comment that women's driving was an issue that needed to be decided by society not the state. This was re-tweeted 1,231 times, received 188 likes and 234 interactions. Postings by *Sabq* electronic newspaper about the interview received between 235 and 405 re-tweets depending on the topic. These tweets varied in content and included the news about King Salman's approval of *Vision 2030* and his hopes that it would prove to be an international model in all respects. Another tweet mentioned the Saudi Cabinet's approval of *Vision 2030*. Both tweets posted photographs of King Salman, Mohammed bin Nayef (the then Crown Prince) and Prince MbS. Tweets by the Saudi Press Agency generally received lower interaction although its post about Aramco received 256 re-tweets, 56 likes and one interaction.

The hashtag included tweets from Twitter accounts belonging to Saudi newspapers who published the most important parts of Prince MbS's interview and the key elements of his plan. These publications included *Al Watan* and *Al Riyadh*. Their tweets were distinguished by their use of infographics to explain the goals of *Vision 2030*. They received 2,147 re-tweets, 1516 likes and 79 interactions.

Other Saudi newspapers interacted with the event, including *Al Riyadh*, *Al Jazirah*, *Al Watan*, *Al Yaum*, *Okaz* and *Al Eqtisadiyah*. However, there was no or limited interaction with these Twitter accounts, except for *Al Riyadh*, which was the only one to summarize the key points of *Vision 2030* and Prince MbS's interview using infographics. This indicates that Saudi newspapers have a social media presence but rely mostly on traditional media tools, meaning they hold little attraction for new media users.

This was most evident in levels of Twitter user interaction with the Saudi Infographics account, which specializes in presenting key Saudi events through infographic designs. Several tweets posted on this account received greater interaction through re-tweets, likes and comments than local Saudi media accounts.

Two of the key themes of *Vision 2030* received roughly similar levels of interaction with 117 re-tweets for the announcement concerning the Green Card project and 134 relating to the establishment of an Islamic museum. The following *Vision 2030* -related items prompted interaction in the form of re-tweets:

1. Links to the broadcast of the *Vision 2030* interview were re-tweeted 61 times.
2. News that King Salman approved of *Vision 2030* was re-tweeted 220 times.
3. Cabinet approval of *Vision 2030* was re-tweeted 142 times.

6.8.3 Informative Tweets from the @Saudi_Vision_2030 Account

The official account @Saudi_Vision_2030 was launched on the same day as the strategic plan was announced and received 13,900 re-tweets relating to the key themes and content of the *Vision 2030* interview with Prince MbS. Tweets about the plan and Saudi Arabia's global and regional significance received 41,286 re-tweets, 10,762 likes and 1,070 interactions. In addition, tweets concerning the plans to build the largest Islamic museum in the world in Riyadh open to non-Muslim visitors were re-tweeted 5,184 times, received 222 likes and 427 interactions. It is apparent that all the core themes in the plan received interaction and were re-tweeted. The least re-tweeted item concerned the transformation of the Saudi Public Investment Fund into a leading international investment institution.

This account also tweeted the text of Prince MbS's interview, prompting great interaction among tweeters with one user noting that Prince MbS had commented: "The country's youth will be the fuel for this vision," receiving 5360 re-tweets, 2094 likes and 210 interactions. Another tweet stating that "The Kingdom will be a powerful country we will all be proud of" was re-tweeted 5295 time, and received 1520 likes and 382 interactions.

In general, the *Vision 2030* account produced a lot of interaction. In total it generated more than 5,000 retweets, with the smallest number of retweets for a item being 2,028. Tweets also featured the posting of videos and infographics about the plan, as well as photographs of MbS, who is recognised as the plan's architect.

6.9 Conclusion

The Twitter data collected here highlight Saudi public interest in relation to citizen journalism. The Royal Decrees and economic issues can be considered to be a matter of public interest as they affect Saudi citizens' social and political lives on a daily basis. The level of freedom on Twitter allows citizen journalists to express their opinions via their own account and to engage interactively with other users by responding to their questions. This two-way communication enables social media to be highly interactive, while the local press depends on one-way interaction with its readers. Twitter highlights the role of citizen journalists in the KSA during crisis times, according to their specialism, meaning that they explain, interact and therefore they have a greater presence on social media than in local news media which tend to react more slowly or provide less information.

These Twitter findings help to address the knowledge gap identified earlier in this thesis by revealing those elements that can contribute to creating a model of public interest citizen journalism in the KSA. Central here are the levels of freedom of expression available on Twitter, extensive users' interaction, and the prominent role of what this thesis defines as the KSA citizen journalists during times of economic challenge, if not crisis, in the KSA. The next chapter of this thesis will draw together, present and analyse the features of this research's model of PICJ in the KSA.

Chapter Seven: Towards a Better Understanding of the Relationship between the Public Interest and Citizen Journalism in the KSA

7.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the results of the research set out in the previous two chapters, by synthesising evidence from the interviews (Chapter 5), Twitter data analysis (Chapter 6) and insights from the literature review (Chapter 2). The analysis is underpinned by the four inter-related main themes which gave rise to the project's research questions (see 0) as shown in Figure 7.1 below. The aim of this research is to provide a better understanding of the manifestations of, and relationship between, PI and citizen journalism (CJ) in Saudi Arabia (KSA). In service of the achievement of this aim, this chapter will provide an explanatory model of PICJ in the KSA.



Figure 0.1: Research Questions

7.2 Factors that Led to the Rise of CJ in the KSA

This section focuses on CJ, and the factors that have shaped CJ practice in non-democratic countries such as the KSA. According to the data gathered by the current study, freedom of expression, informative content, sources of information and channels of communication with the government are the key constituents in the development and functioning of CJ in developing countries.

7.2.1 Freedom of Expression in CJ

The censorship exerted on traditional media in the KSA has made a powerful contribution to the creation of Saudi CJ as defined in this research, on SM platforms such as Twitter. The literature review revealed that traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers) are still significant shapers of public opinion and government trends in the KSA (Alghamdy, 2011 and Masa'deh et al., 2013). By law, the state controls the Saudi press, and makes editors responsible for preventing criticism of the Saudi royal family, religion or government policies (see 0). In order to better enforce this, the Ministry of Information appoints editors-in-chief who restrict journalists in publishing articles about important social and political issues (Alnajrani et al., 2018). For several decades, the traditional press was the only source of information that Saudis had recourse to, with the result that it had a strong influence on public opinion and heavily influenced what the Saudi public regarded as credible sources of information (*ibid*). As the evidence analysed by this thesis has shown, the greater freedom of expression granted by Twitter on the hashtags examined had an impact on the nature of journalism in the KSA. Specifically, citizen journalists are able to cross the 'red lines' of censorship in a way that journalists working for traditional newspapers cannot. All the public figures who were interviewed referred to difficulties they had experienced with publishing articles in the traditional press and how this had motivated them to use Twitter as a platform for their articles (see 0).

Both the interviews and the Twitter data highlighted that Saudi citizen journalists have greater freedom to express their views and cover issues on this platform. This contrasts with the restrictions imposed on conservative mainstream Saudi media. Data from this study also show strongly that Twitter is a platform for citizen journalists practising in the KSA. In 2013, Anne Gaviola, a CBC journalist reported that 40% of Twitter account holders in the KSA, were considered 'active'. This is the highest rate worldwide and demonstrates that Twitter has become the most significant SM platform for Saudis. With 17.29 million Twitter users, the KSA leads the MENA region for Twitter adoption (Alnajrani et al., 2018; gmi_blogger, 2018).

The literature suggests that CJ can act as a bridge between ordinary people, on the one hand, and state institutions and traditional media on the

other, creating a space where political, social and economic issues can be more openly debated. Studies have emphasised how radical CJ can be on platforms such as Twitter, especially in non-democratic countries like the KSA, where it allows people to participate more actively in debates about issues that affect their communities, rather than just being told about them (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Dahlgren, 2005; Hamdy, 2009; Radsch and Karlekar, 2012; Khasib, 2015; Sienkiewicz, 2014). This research has shown that since CJ does not require permission from gatekeepers, unlike traditional press organizations, a wider range of stories can be covered, including subjects previously considered taboo in Arab society. Hamdy (2009) argues that bloggers have played an important role in this context by expressing their opinion freely about subjects such as sexual harassment and police brutality. This also applies to citizen journalists' coverage of economic issues during the economic crisis in the KSA explored in this study.

Analysis of the discussion of economic issues such as the White Lands Tax highlighted that CJ on Twitter is able to shed light on issues that the traditional press currently does not cover, either because its journalists lack sufficient expertise in this area or due to restrictions that are imposed externally by media regulation or internally by cautious editors for a variety of reasons. Both (E(Prof1) and W(Prof2) thought that citizen journalists enjoyed a greater level of freedom and independence than their professional counterparts. The Twitter data highlighted the different opinions held by Saudis on Twitter (see the ideological discussion on White Lands Tax in 0 and criticism by users of Prince Mishal bin Abel Aziz in 0).

During an economic crisis, the press can play an important role in explaining its causes and in helping citizens to understand how this is likely to affect their lives. Due to censorship and regulation in the KSA, however, the Saudi press has not discussed this crisis objectively or in sufficient depth. Since a high proportion of Saudis have Internet access and five million have Twitter accounts, the latter represents a powerful CJ platform for discussing issues that may be considered too sensitive by the press (Freedom House, 2016). One interviewee (Colm1) thought that SM discussions may influence other media to cover stories that they might otherwise have chosen to avoid, stating that once issues such as poverty and corruption had been aired on Twitter, journalists

writing for the traditional press felt they also had more freedom to address them. CJ is also able, to some extent, to circumvent the censorship which hampers the traditional press (see 0). Online newspaper editors are aware that their sites are subject to censorship and can be blocked by the government, and that being considered overly contentious can lead to a loss of readership (Awad, 2010; Alotaibi, 2017).

Ali (2012) claimed that citizen journalists in certain Asian countries must contend with both religious taboos and Internet censorship. However, based on an analysis of data from the interviews and Twitter, the findings of this research appear to contradict this in respect of the KSA. Difficulties caused by censorship of the traditional press by editors-in-chief was a concern of the public figures interviewed, who cited this as an important reason for posting on Twitter. One interviewee (PF1) provided insights into the difficulties faced by anyone trying to publish articles on sensitive issues in the traditional press. Editors-in-chief are unlikely to allow publication of articles considered to include prohibited items and to demand changes to be made. Twitter, on the other hand, passes the accountability for content directly to account holders, giving them greater freedom to express their views and exchange information freely. Citizen journalists on platforms like Twitter are not subject to the control of editors-in-chief and they do not need to concern themselves with not offending advertisers, and as such they enjoy greater freedom of speech.

Saudi professional journalists, in turn, also cited lack of freedom in the traditional press as a reason for using platforms like Twitter. They noted that the topic of 'white lands' fees received limited coverage in the traditional press due to strict regulations, whereas citizens were free to air their views about this issue on Twitter. Professional journalists based at *Al-Eqtisadiyah*, a daily newspaper which focuses exclusively on economic and business news and analysis, emphasised that CJ was much more independent, with one commenting that this degree of freedom actually distinguished CJ from professional journalism in the KSA (Prof2). CJ in the KSA is potentially a powerful and radical new force that has not only disrupted the monopoly that state-controlled media had over news but also prompted government action, such as dismissing inadequate ministers (see 0). In this study, CJ is said to be carried out by authorised journalists (called 'columnists') who use Twitter to

cover economic affairs more extensively than they can do in the traditional press; and those identified as 'public figures' can be classed as journalists producing PICJ in the KSA (see 0). Saudi citizen journalists have more expertise in economic affairs than professional journalists who are simply licensed to work as professional journalists in the KSA by the SJA. Analysis of selected Saudi hashtags on Twitter shows that citizen journalists are professional in the sense that their qualifications relate to their background in economic affairs. They consider Twitter to be a useful platform for freely publishing their points regarding the economic crisis.

The level of freedom to criticize institutions such as the Saudi government and the Royal Family was demonstrated by the analysis of data from #White_Lands_Fees, #Saudi_Vision_2030 and #Royal_Decrees (2015/2016). Sarcastic comments about Prince Mishal's opposition to the land tax, how this would benefit him financially and how members of the elite avoided paying bills, represented the first example of a member of the Saudi Royal Family being openly criticised in the media, and something that could not have occurred in traditional state-controlled media due to regulations. Tweets on #White_Lands_Fees not only criticised individuals but also provided insights into how Royal Decrees are enacted. The corruption which often allowed those in power immunity from the law was commented on, and Royal Decrees were described by one tweeter (T3000) as "just words on paper." Religious leaders also expressed their views about the Saudi government on the same hashtag, free from the 'red lines' imposed by traditional press censorship.

The breadth of discussion and levels of criticism afforded by platforms such as Twitter indicate that they provide a degree of freedom rarely found in the Saudi traditional press. #White_Lands_Tax_Officially_Imposed, for example, sparked ideological discussions about the political aspects of this issue; including a conversation between liberal tweeter aboShla5libraly and the conservative cleric Dr. Abdel Aziz Al Rayyes concerning whether taxing land was in accordance with *shari'ah* law (see 0). This proved to be of particular interest as Saudi media policy forbids the criticism of religious leaders in the traditional press. Debates on this hashtag also demonstrated that open criticism of government decisions from all political perspectives and debates between ordinary citizens and experts on economic matters have become commonplace

on Saudi Twitter. Sometimes this criticism 'pulled no punches', for example land speculation in the KSA was described as "the greatest crime committed against the nation and its citizens" (T503). This is undoubtedly a remarkable development in the Saudi media system and in Saudi society.

The #royal_decrees_2016 also contained tweets that were openly critical of Royal Decrees on economic grounds as well as demands to restrict the Royal Family's allowances. The sizeable reaction to tweets by Al Uhaidib (1070 re-tweets, 224 likes and 68 interactions) who criticized religious writers and preachers for trying to reassure Saudis about the rightness and legitimacy of Royal Decrees with a Quranic verse or extract from the *Hadith* shows a high level of interest by the public in this issue and is highly unusual in that it shows direct public communication about members of the clergy. . Al Uhaidib implied that rather than being concerned about the economic stability of ordinary people, Saudi clerics were more concerned about "the cinema and women" (see 0). This illustrates how Twitter allows freedom of expression in contrast to the traditional press where it is still not acceptable to criticize the clergy. Tweets on the hashtags analysed in this study also highlighted the interests of elites that lay behind state economic decisions, supporting the argument made by Almaghlooth (2013) that religious elites monitor the production of news in Saudi Arabia, and have extensive influence over the media.

Some Twitter users considered *Vision 2030* (see 0) to be one of the reasons why the Saudi government had imposed austerity measures. Class issues were highlighted by some tweeters who wondered why the poor rather than the rich were being targetted and how effective these measures would be in reducing Saudi dependence on oil. Criticism of the Royal Decrees 2016 first appeared on Twitter and the reaction to this by other users who saw it as 'unpatriotic' demonstrates the impact that this had. The ensuing debate about the political nature of imposing austerity measures provided insights into what it means to be patriotic in times of crisis and the origins of the crisis. A Royal Family member's plea for citizens to "stand by the state in times of hardship" (T38) produced a large response (1405 re-tweets, 476 likes and 1269 interactions). Some users criticized T38, calling for allowances paid to the Royal Family to be stopped. The tone adopted in some of these interactions was far from deferential, contrasting his lavish lifestyle with the hardships suffered by

ordinary citizens (see 0). Given current Saudi media policy, such dialogues would not be possible in the traditional press and they confirm findings by other authors (Alsaggaf and Simmons 2015; Fung et al., 2013; Alejandro, 2010; Almaghlooth, 2013; Al Ghothami, 2016) who argue that platforms like Twitter create a direct link between ordinary citizens and powerful elites.

This research has provided evidence that CJ in the KSA is not only a means of offering criticism of economic policy, but also of holding particular public institutions and individuals to account. One example of this was the tweets posted by Khalid Al Alkami, a citizen journalist and public figure, demanding that Prince Mohammed bin Salman kept his promises regarding financial support for citizens on low incomes, as these had failed to materialise. This tweeter also called for political reforms to ensure citizens' participation in decision-making, increased monitoring of public funds and the state apparatus in general, with a view to ending corrupt allocation of grants. This illustrates how one writer, whose articles are routinely rejected for publication in the traditional Saudi press, uses Twitter as a platform to provide hard-hitting criticism of economic and political issues. Like the 'white lands' issue, the Royal Decrees have also attracted harsh comment in Twitter posts which claim that profiteering is tantamount to criminal behaviour. For example T511 tweeted: "these speculators have stolen the country's lands and the citizens' dreams".

The international nature of Twitter means contributors from all over the world can participate in discussions about Saudi issues. Although it is not always easy to distinguish between domestic and overseas tweeters, some users do show their locations, indicating the international nature of some of these debates. For example, news about war and unrest published in traditional media created online participation from contributors from Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen. The Arab Spring revolutions were characterised both by local activists making use of SM to organise demonstrations and the same platforms being used for international dissemination of news and discussion of these events as they unfolded, with Twitter playing a prominent role. Government recognition of the power of the Internet as a way for activists and citizens to organise and communicate was reflected in the Egyptian government's decision to block their citizens' access to it for an entire week (Lotan et al., 2011). In

Saudi Arabia, the concept of gatekeeping extends to authoritarian governments and other public relations institutions (Ali & Fahmy, 2013).

This adds another dimension to the freedom Twitter affords citizen journalists, as distance is no object in the virtual world and debates can include groups of Saudis who are living abroad for whatever reason. It should be noted, however, that Twitter contributions to Saudi debates are not always by Saudis and do not necessarily add to rational deliberation. Furthermore, hashtags that trend mainly as a result of re-tweets can be the result of bot activity or the re-activation of dormant fake accounts (see □). Indeed, when interviewed some journalists raised the issue that not all postings on Twitter were credible and that some hashtags have been used by enemies of the KSA to incite dissatisfaction amongst Saudi citizens (see 0).

Examples include tweets by Saed Al Faqih, a Saudi opposition politician based in London. He commented that as the state controlled the traditional press there was no platform for those who did not agree with the government. Via Twitter, he expressed his opinion that *Vision 2030* was being funded by government cuts and raised taxes, destroying citizens' original optimism about this.

Analysis of data from interviews and tweets has thus largely supported previous arguments in the literature that SM platforms like Twitter afford citizen journalists more freedom than the traditional press. For example, Worth (2012) and Al Jenabi (2016) assert that Twitter has afforded a platform for all social groups to collectively address sensitive issues in real time, leading to real social changes.

Results from this study have yielded useful examples of how and why this is the case in the Saudi context. Freedom of expression in the KSA is shaped by factors such as state censorship, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs, all of which have been outlined in this thesis (see Alnajrani et al., 2018); advertisers can also use economic pressure to exert power over what is published. For example, in 2017, state censorship was in evidence after the Saudi Minister of Media requested that the MBC¹⁰² channel pulled a TV

¹⁰² MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Centre) was the first private free-to-air satellite broadcasting company in the Arab World. After launching in 1991 in London, it moved its

programme hosted by Jordanian presenter Ola al-Fares after she posted a message on Twitter on December 7, criticising the stance taken by Washington's regional allies toward an announcement by US President Donald Trump in which, despite overwhelming global opposition, he recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Figure 0.2: Tweet by Jordanian journalist Ola Al Fares



Al Fares' tweet reads "Trump did not choose this specific time to declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel for no reason. After he visited us, it became clear that Arabs will condemn his declaration tonight, and tomorrow will sing '*Hala Bil Khamis!*'¹⁰³ This was seen as insulting to Saudi Arabia, as it suggests that Saudis are condoning Trump's action. This tweet trended in a hashtag that expressed upset about Alfares' tweet. Thus, this tweet caused public outrage and then led to political action. This incident shows how state censorship controls official and private media while also highlighting that the Saudi government pays attention to what is posted on Twitter.

Journalistic freedom of expression in non-democratic countries is undeniably affected by state censorship, but there are other factors that may affect this, including religious practices and cultural traditions. A study by Alnajrani et al. (2018) revealed three major factors that reflected the concerns of Saudi journalists regarding their freedom of expression: (1) religious concerns

headquarters to Dubai in 2002. The MBC Group provides multiple channels of information, interaction and entertainment, including 11 TV channels. According to *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, as part of moves to seize assets of businessmen involved in corruption investigations, founder and chairman of MBC Board of Directors, Waleed Al Ibrahim, was held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in November 2017. On release, sources state Saudi officials transferred 60% of MBC group's ownership to the state, leaving the remaining 40% to Al Ibrahim (East, 2018).

¹⁰³ This Arabic phrase (literally, 'Welcome Thursday'), originally appeared in a song by Syrian-based singer Maan Barghouth, but has become a catchphrase on the Internet used to signify happiness at the start of what in the Arabic world is the start of the weekend.

and the power of clerics; (2) the lack of publication concerning women's activities; and (3) the pressure of social behavioural norms. These factors have all contributed to establishing the amount of freedom of expression allowed in Saudi journalism. The current study has shown how freedom of expression may be affected by various factors.

In addition to state censorship, journalistic independence is also affected by economic pressures since private media organisations need to generate income from advertising, meaning that stories likely to cause companies to withdraw advertising revenue may be dropped. SM platforms, such as Twitter, allow citizen journalists to publish information and commentaries without having to worry about offending advertisers. Free from this restriction, they can also attract international interest in the sensitive issues they discuss as well as generating local interest (Al Sabah, 2007; Hamdy, 2009). Though some authors, such as Cammaerts, hold the opinion that SM is falling under the control of 'large media conglomerates and venture capitalists' and becoming influenced by online advertisers (2008, p.361), which can then create limitations on CJ, this was not found to be the case in the Saudi Twitter hashtags explored in the thesis.

Interview data from this research shows that Saudi newspapers are still controlled by the need to avoid angering those organizations that are a major source of funding.¹⁰⁴ For example, one columnist (Colm 10) stated that newspapers refused to publish his reports about banks and telecommunications companies breaking the law on the grounds that they represented valuable advertising revenue sources for those publications, suggesting that press companies were more interested in potential financial losses than the significance of news content.

Columnists also highlighted that informative economic content was published on Twitter while the traditional press lacked transparency in dealing with economic news owing to censorship and regulation by officials and government authorities. Colm9 claims that his CJ focuses on "the crucial issues" which he could not mention in the articles on economic affairs that he

¹⁰⁴ In the Saudi context this applies to companies and organizations such as banks, telecommunications and companies.

writes for the traditional press. One professional journalist (Prof1) also complained during interview that the traditional press was greatly restricted by fears of losing revenue from advertisers if it published anything that would upset them. In his study, Alsbah (2007) had previously showed that Saudi print media depends on advertising as a major source of income.

Although the state press and private press are funded differently, they are both subject to the same pressures about having to conform to strictures about only reporting what the authorities perceive to be in the national interest. The Saudi private media has more financial flexibility and can arguably attract better professional competencies (Alkahfi, 2004); but they must also support Saudi government policies and please advertisers.

The results of this study indicate that a greater level of freedom of expression is one of the constituents of CJ practice in the KSA as evidenced by citizen journalists' dissemination of specialist information on economic issues and their social responsibility in explaining this economic crisis with sound supporting evidence. Interviewees were unanimous that CJ on Twitter was the result of poor quality and lack of transparency in the traditional press, and only one, E(Prof3), was of the opinion that the traditional press contained more accurate information.

Saudi citizen journalists' tweets on #White_Lands_Fees and #Royal_Decrees_2016 and the views of several interviewees highlighted CJ's perceived role in raising awareness about economic issues (see0). This role of raising awareness of economic issues by providing well-evidenced and clearly explained information suggests a strong link to the freedom of expression that SM provides citizen journalists in the KSA.

In 2015 Saudi citizen journalists began actively covering the political and economic changes caused by the financial crisis. Twitter was often the first port of call for drawing citizens' attention to particular issues and demanding explanations and accurate information from official sources and specialists. Data from interviewees (Colm4, Colm6, Colm8, Colm9 and Prof2 – see 0) revealed that they believed CJ contributed to raising economic awareness among Saudis by presenting economic information using easily understandable language and infographics.

This supports Jemei'a's study (2017) that demonstrated a high number of Twitter postings on economic reforms (40.38%) were by citizen journalists who were deemed 'opinion leaders', 76% of whom supported their arguments with statistical data from international reports by economics experts. Some 47.9% of the content they posted provided negative evaluations of the economic reforms, which are not allowed in the traditional press. Some tweets analysed in this study thanked citizen journalists for their contributions, and many CJ accounts were referred to as supporting the interests of citizens by drawing attention to the issue (see 0). Although the CJ on Twitter that was analysed in this study made good use of accurate and relevant objective facts to support arguments, citizen journalists are seen as being on the side of ordinary Saudi citizens, rather than as purely neutral commentators.

7.2.2 High-Quality Informative Content on Twitter as a Source of Information

According to Allan and Thorsen (2009) and Newman (2009), CJ emerged strongly in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 when people looked to the Internet for eyewitness reports on events unfolding at the site of the attacks. This trend was later adopted by mainstream media, which started to search for eyewitness accounts. By the 2005 London bombings, mainstream media had realised that electronic CJ was an important facet of media, as those caught up in the attack shared their images and personal accounts with the mass media. These new channels of information, in association with the rising involvement of readers within the new media ecosystem, has greatly tested the role played by journalists in the news creation process (Stanoevska-Slabeva et al., 2012). According to Jurrat (2011), the spread of CJ in the 21st century has been boosted by the fact that it can highlight issues on a global platform or reveal issues that the government or those in power would prefer to conceal. Ordinary people who are caught up in events can provide accounts of their experiences in writing and visually using stills and videos, whilst remaining independent of editorial censorship. Authors note, however, that CJ is not unbiased and its credibility and reliability must be considered (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Dare, 2011; Harper, 2014). As stated above, the CJ analysed in this study was largely seen as being biased towards the viewpoint of ordinary citizens. However, this arguably acts as a balance

against the largely deferential standpoint of the traditional media and the evidence given in the CJ appeared credible and reliable.

As well as providing an alternative viewpoint to that of traditional press, citizen journalists can also disseminate their media articles on economics either in the traditional press or on blogs, especially during times of crisis. They can attract readers using powerful visual material such as photographs and videos which can have more impact than text, with social networking sites such as Flickr allowing them to search for and store images or share them with others (Allan and Thorsen, 2009).

A review of the literature found examples of CJ sites have been created in response to the perception that mainstream media covers news that is relevant to particular communities inadequately (for example, those cited by Bruns et al., 2008). The gap between the information available on Twitter about the Saudi economic crisis, and that provided in traditional press was summarised by one interviewee (PF1), who said that young readers would feel that the two were talking about totally different worlds. Despite some increases in press freedom, the official media failed to highlight the same issues as Twitter which was able to provide a fuller, more realistic picture of the situation, as it was not subject to the same restrictions. Public figures interviewed for this study were unanimous that the poor quality of content in Saudi traditional press had produced CJ on platforms like Twitter. Anecdotal evidence from these interviewees also suggested that the traditional press did not check their sources, thus negatively affecting their credibility (see section 0 for details).

All the public figures interviewed in the research also felt that the material they posted on Twitter was unlike that found in traditional press and that it was incumbent upon them to use their economic expertise to explain the outcomes of the government's economic decisions to Saudi citizens. This arguably demonstrates that citizen journalists may feel duty bound to provide comment and information to their readers and their community unlike their counterparts in the traditional Saudi press who are committed to their employers. Columnists reported that followers turned to specialist CJ on Twitter as they sometimes did not wholly understand explanations relating to the economic crisis in the official media and also needed clarification about terms such as 'budget' or 'inflation' The fact that these are non-specialist terms indicates the low level of economic

awareness among Saudi citizens. Interviewee Colm1 referred to statistics that showed Saudi financial awareness had risen from a very low score of 1% in 2006 to 12% in 2014 (see 0). Columnists also claimed that they tried to be objective in order to maintain credibility. The public figures concurred with columnists that CJ on Twitter acted as an independent and comprehensive media institution, providing news and information and influencing public opinion. They also thought that the lack of information and transparency in traditional media, the scarcity of staff qualified to understand economic issues and the delays in announcements on official media had all contributed to the emergence of CJ as an alternative source of information.

All the interviewees stressed the importance of ensuring that information sources were accurate, provided up-to-date facts and interpreted these objectively to build credibility and trust. Some professional journalists also commended CJ as a reliable source while others thought professional journalism was more credible due to more direct access to official sources and the decades of experience and reputation built up by traditional media outlets. However, several interviewees believed the public preferred CJ for economic news as they mistrusted official information. Thus Saudi CJ was seen as being more reliable than other journalism, which challenges many of the preconceived ideas about CJ as 'unprofessional'. One columnist (Colm1) revealed that a minister and his deputy were ignorant of the contents of their own report (see 0). Nevertheless, columnists acknowledged that when discussing sensitive issues they needed to abide by Saudi regulations and sometimes also relied on information issued by the authorities. Twitter data analysis revealed that citizen journalists were asked many questions about economic issues and their answers were re-tweeted, sometimes hundreds of times (see section 0).

These findings echo those of many authors who identified CJ as an important source of accurate and independent information (Rosen, 2008; Bowman and Willis, 2003) provided in part by those who were once news consumers (Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Jurrat, 2011; Dare, 2011). Moreover, the study conducted by Rosenbaum (2011) highlighted that, in times of crisis, user-generated content in Arab nations entails that citizens handle a substantial amount of information from a variety of sources, for the purpose of identifying, sorting, authenticating, unifying, relating, and preserving current useful details, and to

include them into a more well-rounded resource (Rotman et al., 2011). Although CJ is not subject to any professional editorial board (Jurrat, 2011), this study found that in terms of their qualifications, the citizen journalists interviewed could be considered more specialized in economic matters than their professional counterparts (see 0). Thus, Harper's contention (2014) that many perceive CJ to be an unreliable source was not found to true for the PICJ explored in the current study. Many tweets in #Saudi_Vision_2030 commented that the online news they obtained from CJ on Twitter provided all they needed (see 0). CJ on Twitter clearly represents an important information source for Saudi citizens.

Like the columnists, professional journalists felt that CJ emerged in response to the lack of information and transparency in Saudi media. They noted the lack of informative interpretations of economic policy by either specialists or official bodies; and that since ministers failed to provide information to the press, foreign news sources had to be used (Prof3 and Prof4). Prof2's anecdote about having to wait for the official Saudi News Agency announcement before publishing his report on the 2016 State Budget (see 0 for details) demonstrates the extreme caution exercised by some editors-in-chief, meaning that the public sometimes have to wait before being informed about decisions that will affect their lives. According to journalists from the Saudi newspapers *Al-Riyadh*, *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Watan*, although some citizen journalists who are 'economic celebrities' do not follow online publishing rules, they remain more popular than professional journalists and are considered by these interviewees to have more credibility

Tweet analysis showed that the issues of 'white lands' tax and Royal Decrees were covered in a variety of ways. The brevity of tweet content (which was only 140 characters when the Twitter data for this study was sampled) meant that citizen journalists resorted to various strategies to provide additional information to their followers (see 0 for details). These strategies are summarized in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Table 0.1: Information provision strategies used by Saudi citizen journalists with Twitter accounts

Rashid Al Fozan	Referred followers to Snapchat account for more details
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Burjus Al Burjus	Posted long series of tweets to explain implementation of decree
Abdel Hamid Al Omari	Posted photograph of decree with key points underlined, then further tweets to elaborate and refer followers to material elsewhere, including other media
Fahd Al Qassim	Posted links to further material on the issue
Khalid A Alkami	Responded to questions from users regarding a particular aspect of an issue
Issam Al Zamel	Provided explanations, answered questions, posted information about further material on other media, referred followers to Snapchat account videos, YouTube uploads and tweets on other related hashtags

Many tweets from followers expressed how useful this information from expert citizen journalists had been; and the sheer amount of questions asked on these hashtags demonstrates that Twitter represents an important information source for many Saudis. Indeed, *Vision 2030* has an official Twitter account @saudivision2030 that uses multimedia to convey messages to its audience and produces a lot of interaction, showing that official organisations are now taking advantage of Twitter's popularity as an information source for Saudis. #Saudi_Vision_2030 provided an example of an interaction between a Saudi presenter (Mona AbuSulayman) and a citizen journalist (Barjes) which began in Arabic but went on into English. This interaction highlighted that CJ in the KSA is not restricted to using the official language (Arabic) as is the case in the traditional press. Barjes commonly interacts in English and can do this easily on Twitter.

It should be noted that there is a difference between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is officially used in media communication in the Arab world, and vernacular variants such as Saudi Arabic which have no standardised written form. Many Saudis struggle with MSA (which may also explain why they do not always understand basic economic terminology as they will rarely come across this). As a result some people turn to the international

language of English for their posts, as this not only gets round the problem but may convey a sense that the sender is sophisticated and cosmopolitan.¹⁰⁵

According to Yaros (2009), Saudi citizen journalists on Twitter generally personalize their reports to gain a positive response from their followers, encourage interactivity and make use of graphics and links to add impact and clarity. Twitter discussions about austerity prompted people to share advice about making economies in household finances showing that this platform can act as a source of practical help and advice for the community. For example, Ahmed Al Arfaj posted a video on ways to save money, linking this to his article in *Al Riyadh*. As Bahabri (2017) noted, when used as a platform for CJ, Twitter changes followers' behaviour towards informative content. That means that the Twitter environment now includes informatics and news; and informative accounts, news bulletins and translated material are activated by citizen journalists. The addition of links to contents, shown in Table 7.1, arguably demonstrates that there was a degree of transparency in the PICJ explored in this thesis, as many of these sources verified the explanation of the economic topics addressed. Bahabri (2017) asserts that followers on Twitter are becoming selective and do not want to listen to or be exposed to anyone else. This may be seen as a negative feature of platforms like Twitter but Mansouri (2014) points out that citizens will turn to platforms where there is more freedom of expression and where they feel they have a voice in those societies where traditional media manages public opinion by restricting what is published and limiting interaction with the audience.

This has led to the creation of small communities on Twitter which follow particular social influencers, and which have become specialized blocs surrounding economists, public figures, environmentalists and other topic specialists. Those social influencers are effectively citizen journalists who cover topics related to their specialism more than is done in the traditional press. The Royal Decrees have focused largely on economic issues as with the

¹⁰⁵ Ibrahim Badawood, a Saudi journalist, wrote an article in 2016 entitled "Talk to me in Arabic" lamenting the fact that many Saudis now preferred to speak in English rather than Arabic. *Saudi Gazette*, 29 December 2016. More recently Hossam Abouzahr also commented on problems with MSA on his blog <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/standard-arabic-is-on-the-decline-here-s-what-s-worrying-about-that>

introduction of the 'white lands' tax in 2015 and the announcement of *Vision 2030* in 2016, a new strategy for the KSA intended to deal with the economic crisis. This has led to Saudi citizen journalists specializing in economics making a major impact on Twitter. Baran (2012) agrees that there is still little comprehension of how certain environmental and social influences may cause people to rely on mass media to satisfy certain needs. McElroy (2013), who conducted a study attempting to analyse an audience's motives in regard to psychological and social factors, established a degree of credibility behind the hypodermic needle theory when he found that there exists a difference in how certain lifestyles interacted with specific patterns in the media. In addition, analysis of the data from interviews and hashtags suggests that there is a degree of correlation between Twitter posts by Saudi citizen journalists and subsequent take-up of the issues that they raise in established media in the KSA. A number of interviewees also claimed that there was a strong relationship between the two. This linkage merits further investigation

7.2.3 Direct Impact on Decision Makers

The study yielded several examples of how CJ on Twitter had resulted in action by the government. Two Ministry officials (the Saudi Ambassador to Egypt and the Minister of Health) were dismissed as a result of videos posted on Twitter. Nevertheless, four columnists who were interviewed in the research believed that the impact of CJ on Twitter on Saudi decision-makers was exaggerated, although one professional journalist thought that it had been instrumental in exposing wrongdoing by the Minister of the Civil Service. It is difficult to gauge exactly how powerful exposure on Twitter was in expediting these actions as the inner workings of the government are not always transparent. However, evidence shows that key figures in Saudi journalism, interviewed in this research were convinced of Twitter's impact on decision-makers, whilst others were more sceptical. According to Ernst and Young (2016), the revenue generated from the KSA's land taxation is used by the government to further development projects. While the land tax should be perceived as a tool for supporting further development, citizen journalists in the country argue that it is a means of controlling market forces and an avenue for revenue collection (Parasie, 2015). Additionally, several other citizen journalists have only published a subjective perception on the matter, claiming that the land tax

would be beneficial in urban development due to the increased regulations that stipulate efficient land use practices and other zoning and sustainable planning procedures. This news was propagated despite the obvious research indications that specified that shareholder involvement from other sectors would be necessary in the smooth running of these endeavors (Wenner, 2016). Barr (2009) maintains that the problem with CJ is not so much that they are posting their own populist interpretation of news events, but rather than they are conduits for populist politicians with whom they collaborate, in the sense that they arguably increase the visibility and thus the legitimacy of the political arguments and slogans of these populist politicians.

Data from the #2030 Vision suggests that there was a line of communication between leading citizen journalists and the government, highlighting the possibility that the latter may view this channel as a way to communicate with the public (see Al Omari's reference to his visit with the Crown Prince, 0). The content of postings by citizen journalists specializing in economic issues and their responses to followers' questions demonstrated that they interacted with economic news and the 2015/16 Royal Decrees and raised public awareness about these issues.

As noted earlier in the thesis, the BBC reported a case in 2015 where a post showing King Salman's aide slapping a photographer resulted in the aide's dismissal (see 0). This demonstrates that the impact of such postings in the KSA is also noticed by international media organisations. For example, the Egyptian-American journalist Mona Eltahawy has written about the case of Saudi Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun who escaped from her family and fled to Thailand where she was placed under UN protection. Rahaf's story initially trended on Twitter (#Remove the guardianship system or we will all migrate) and then appeared in international media, such as *Time Magazine* (Hincks, 2019). An earlier instance involved a report by *The Washington Post* about an incident in which Saudis mocked religious law enforcement in the KSA by recounting an incident in which the 'religious police' (the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) detained a cross-dressing shop mascot at a pastry shop (Aldosary, 2016). This example highlights that although religious leaders and social conventions attempt to determine PI, the public can still decide what is pertinent to them. The incident became a hashtag after

images were posted on social media and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice had to issue a statement.

Al Saggaf and Simmons (2015) argue that CJ on SM platforms such as Twitter can act as an 'arena of opposition' to the authorities. Al Ghotami (2016) asserts that the power of Twitter is greater than that of the traditional press in the KSA because when tweets cause public outrage this can lead to political action as illustrated by the case of Hamza Kashghari (see 0), when the Saudi government took action after a hashtag was created requesting that action was taken against Hamza for his blasphemous postings on Twitter.

This study has argued that Twitter provides a channel of communication between influential citizen journalists and the government, noting that opinion leaders on SM are invited to meet members of the government. The columnists interviewed gave examples of how this had led to the government providing more information and taking action to rectify problems. Some public figures argued that Twitter acted as a means of pressurizing ministries by publicly embarrassing them. Professional journalists observed that in addition to criticizing government officials, Twitter has facilitated two-way information flow, as most government institutions now have Twitter accounts which they use to keep abreast of public opinion and tweet information.

This information flow is swift and keeps the public abreast of important social, political and economic developments and provides a means of making government officials more accountable. Citizens help to create this information flow by re-tweeting or posting relevant links. All categories of interviewee thought Twitter was the preferred platform for Saudi citizen journalists due to its popularity with ordinary citizens, government officials and the current monarch. All these interviewees also attributed its popularity to hashtag features that show trending issues and tweet numbers, its technological reliability, news applications and free accounts (see 0). The spread of Smartphone ownership in Saudi society means that Twitter has become available to an ever-increasing number of citizens across the country, with 23 million smartphone users in the KSA in 2017 (*Okaz*, 2017). Interviewees believed that citizen journalists with specialist knowledge had built trust with their followers by providing accurate information and objective explanations of issues.

A Saudi-based study by Rashid (2016) demonstrated that nearly half of participants were convinced that SM contributed to the shaping of public opinion, with an overwhelming majority identifying Twitter as having the greatest effect. This research appears to support these findings and those of authors, like Dahlgren (2005), who argue that SM platforms contain many and diverse voices and offer greater potential within the public sphere than was envisaged by Habermas. This was exemplified in this study by findings that indicated how the traditional media sometimes depend on Twitter posts. Nevertheless, this does not guarantee that the platform will become effective in maintaining insightful public analyses and debates. Some researchers criticise this practice for publishing false information and gathering information that will likely exaggerate the information given and received (Hermida et al., 2012; Johnston, 2015). In addition, when such news platforms allow unsupervised public commentary on their public discussion forums, they encourage the perpetuation of negative mass social behaviour in various forms, such as political activism and cyber-bullying (Jackson, 2019). Askool (2012) suggests that the current use of social media influencers, which he has termed 'network media logic', centres on the use of social media from three main standpoints: production, distribution, and usage. The network media logic shows evidence of significantly individualized types of media content production as compared to the traditional forms of mass media, where only professionals can determine the content to be produced. The users, then, as opposed to the gatekeepers in mass media, decide whether or not information related to the product is relevant and should be passed on (Tamer, 2013).

A number of critical approaches to citizen journalism were included, notably those of Temple (2013), Cammaerts (2008), and Wolfsfeld et al (2013). These scholars generally felt that it was naïve and not critical enough to just assume that CJ on SM would automatically empower ordinary citizens, and they warned that this assumption was too simplistic; this thesis responded to these criticisms in Section 3.3. Wolfsfeld et al (2013) pointed to the importance of contextualisation, and to the need to examine how much socio-economic and political factors help shape a citizen's ideas and action. The Saudi context was covered extensively in this thesis with regards to culture, legal frameworks, and the economy (see p.77). Furthermore, this thesis has explored how, within the

context of the economic crisis in the KSA, Saudi Twitter has served public interest by facilitating debates and exchanges of information about economic issues and decisions taken by the Saudi government that affected the livelihoods of Saudi citizens (see Sections 7.5, 7.5.1, and 7.5.2). Temple (2013) and Cammaerts (2008) are more concerned with identifying the factors that reduce the empowering potential of CJ. These ideas have been taken into consideration (pp.72-74) and have been addressed by examining the way that legislative and religious powers have influenced CJ on Saudi Twitter regarding the economic issues discussed (see Sections 2.4 and 2.5.1.2). The evidence of this research echoes these concerns by pointing to the religious and legislative powers that affect CJ on Twitter and by creating a unique portrait of how these factors shaped discussions on Twitter about specific economic issues at a particular historical time.

Indeed, given the importance of contextualisation, the data used in this thesis provides a detailed overview of Saudi CJ on Twitter as it relates to significant economic issues at a particular time in Saudi history. The study thus serves as a chronicle of how CJ on Twitter served public interest at that time in an economic, cultural, and legal context. This point has been added as a contribution made by the study (see Section 8.2).

7.3 Agenda-Setting for the Traditional Media

It has been argued that the new media allow individuals to select those agendas and create content that reflect their own agendas (Ragas and Roberts, 2009); the results of the current study support this conclusion. In 2001, Chafee and Metzger asserted that there had been a shift in the focus of agenda-setting from what the media tell people to think about to what people tell the media they want to think about. This is relevant to the Saudi context which has undergone several important changes: from a privately-owned press setting its own agenda for media coverage (pre-1964) to a state-controlled press (Al-Harith, 1983) to the present situation. Writing in 2006, Al Saud concluded that the Saudi state-controlled mainstream media set the agenda; this research suggests that now CJ on SM platforms like Twitter clearly makes a contribution to a more dynamic and rich SM environment. CJ in the KSA is considered to be a source of information for traditional media as stakeholders who set media priorities.

This study has uncovered evidence of this both in the interviews, where one professional journalist (Prof1) cited several Twitter accounts belonging to experts on economics as sources of information for articles he wrote on economic matters; and in the Twitter data, as citizen journalists posted links to articles and TV interviews in which they gave their opinions.

The interviewees suggested that traditional media relies on CJ as one of its primary sources of information; and the analysis of Twitter data found that CJ content is widely disseminated by traditional media with many television broadcasters relying on trending hashtags to provide discussion material for talk shows in the KSA, such as *Tafa'olokom* (Your Interaction) broadcast on Al Arabiya. Indeed, issues raised by CJ on Twitter are often picked up by the traditional press, such as the case of a child detained in hospital as the family were unable to pay the treatment bill (see 0).

Some columnists reported that their material was used by TV and newspapers; and professional journalists confirmed that CJ was widely used to identify which economic issues were of particular interest to the public. One (PF1) observed that "countless" tweets of his had appeared in press reports and on talk shows. These results indicate that CJ sometimes sets priorities and topics for the traditional media.

This begs the question: Why do SM networks in the KSA attract the attention of the public more than traditional audio-visual media despite content transmission for both CJ and traditional media accounts on Twitter delivering information with updates? The difference lies in interactivity, in that traditional audio-visual media relies on a mono-channel to transmit its message, whereas SM work on rapid and instant reactions among users such as users of Twitter. where CJ offers a credible alternative voice on economic affairs news. Moreover, SM users on platforms like Twitter set the agenda for what is discussed, and often the traditional media follows in its wake (see 0). However, evidence from this study has shown that these authors concentrate on the positive side of activism on Twitter and that the situation is more complex, especially as the government is clearly very interested in monitoring anything resembling political activism on social media.

According to Al-Jenaibi (2016, p.67) the popularity of Twitter in the KSA is due to the fact it allows citizens to take part in open and honest discussions.

Al-Jenaibi highlights two groups of Saudis that have particularly benefitted from Twitter: Saudi women and young people. Saudi women in particular have made use of Twitter for campaigning on many different social equality issues including domestic violence, child brides, female suffrage, the right to drive and the guardianship system using the hashtag #SaudiWomenRevolution. Young Saudis feel that Twitter gives them a voice, allows them to speak freely in debates with other individuals from across the political spectrum. Worth (2012, p.1) also argues that “Twitter has allowed Saudis to cross social boundaries and address delicate subjects collectively and in real time”. According to Neuman and Guggenheim (2011), digital technology has ensured the development of interactive linkages between the sender and the receiver, making it easier for both to bypass the initial forceful influence of the mass media. They established that opinion leaders, individuals whose ideas are respected by the public, have the ability to alter dominant features of the news, including those influenced by mass media.

7.4 Twitter’s Role in Linking PI and CJ

Two of Twitter’s most relevant features are the instant interactivity it allows and the richness of media (videos, images, audio, text) it provides. These two features are particularly attractive to the Saudi youth, making Twitter a source that many young Saudis rely on. By analysing the tweeting trends for the hashtags considered in this study, it was found that the first tweets set the tone for all the following posts. For example, if the first tweets on a hashtag hold a positive view on a particular issue, the following tweets are usually positive, whereas if the initial tweets are negative, the tweets that follow tend to also be negative. This was evident in the Twitter data collected for the 2015/2016 Royal Decrees and the economic issues of 2015/2016 (see Sections 6.3 and 6.4). The initial tweets on the 2015 Royal Decrees conveyed a positive tone, containing words of gratitude and optimism from tweeters, and they were followed by similarly positive tweets; the initial tweets related to the 2016 Royal Decrees hashtag were critical and negative, in particular about the decision to cut salaries, and they were followed by similarly negative and critical tweets. This evidence suggests that the behaviour of Saudis on Twitter is largely influenced

by CJ and that it is greatly affected by the dominant view and trend of a certain hashtag, despite the fact that some users showed a fair level of knowledge of concepts related to economics, which they demonstrated by asking technical questions and their ability to express their views objectively. However, previous literature on this topic has found that Saudi Twitter users tend to take on extreme views – either positive or negative – and often lack balance in the way they express their opinions (see 0). Nevertheless, most Saudis consider it to be in their interest to be able to voice opinions on important issues.

The lack of investigative journalism in Saudi media is one of the factors that has influenced the emergence - and the ongoing popularity - of CJ, particularly on Twitter. A second factor is the decline in the level of trust in traditional media and in its professionalism and ability to cover and meet current information needs, which are ever growing. It can be argued that the appeal of CJ as an alternative to mainstream media in the KSA is based on a combination of features which can be summarized as follows:

- **It is free of charge:** Citizen journalists are not paid employees. They do not need high costs to publish their material; they only need a Twitter account, which at the moment is available free of charge;
- **Independent:** Citizen journalists are not part of any media institution that can impose a particular editorial line or policy; they are not forced to submit their material to anyone for editing or censoring;
- **Freedom of speech:** Citizen Journalists are not subject to the same restrictions as professional journalists. There are few things that limit their journalistic activity, no matter how tough the conditions.
- **Simplicity:** CJ bypasses the bureaucratic procedures that traditional media must follow before publishing the news. It is not restricted to particular writing, editing, or filming methods or techniques. It does not require state-of-the-art recording and broadcasting tools: the citizen only needs to document the moment as he or she sees it, without any embellishments or control by gatekeepers.

SM platform represent a competitive environment for the expression of controversial ideas and topics. For most Arab users, and Saudi ones in particular, Twitter represents a space with a much greater degree of freedom of speech compared to traditional media, which has contributed to creating a space for communication, expression of ideas and transmission of information. Today, Twitter represents one of the main SM pillars of criticism regarding

issues that are considered taboo in the traditional press. This was clear in the criticism on the #White_Lands_Tax hashtag directed towards those princes and government officials who are land-owners. It was also evident in the criticism directed towards Vision 2030, the economic strategy showcased by Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman on the 2016 Royal Decrees hashtag. The researcher also found evidence that Saudi users on Twitter come from heterogeneous communities and social backgrounds, and hold a wide range of beliefs (see Section 0). This heterogeneity is not as prominent in people who consume traditional media. This reinforces the idea that Twitter makes an important contribution to the PI by providing a forum where citizens can access opinions from diverse sections of the community and where CJ itself has a more diverse flavour than that found in the traditional Saudi media.

7.5 PI and CJ

When considering what is in the PI i.e. what issues should be of concern to all citizens, it is important to relate this to the context of media regulation and the relationship between the media and the state, as well as issues of privacy. Freedom of expression on Twitter allows citizen journalists in Saudi Arabia to post on economic issues and explain Royal Decrees, which they see as being in the PI. Certain factors shape freedom of expression in the Saudi traditional press. One of them is media regulation and the censorship exercised by editors-in-chief and the state that controls coverage of economic issues by the traditional press, especially at times of crisis, when the media should arguably be both informing the public and allowing them to express their views. Freedom of expression concerning such matters is thus in itself in the PI (Elliott, 2012). In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, CJ grew as a result of the events of 2010-2011 known as the Arab Spring and the recent oil crisis in the Gulf States, meeting the public's need for accurate information on matters that deeply affected their lives. Napoli's (2015) suggestion that rather than being used as an ideological device by governments to regulate media, the concept of PI can guide the media into providing what media consumers want would appear to be the case with perceptions of CJ on Twitter by Saudi users.

Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in this study reveals that CJ serves to highlight the interests and concerns of citizens, including their desire to ask questions and express their views. Columnists noted that, unlike the traditional press in the KSA, which serves the interests of elites and state, CJ focuses on the concerns of ordinary citizens, and specifically how economic policy is likely to affect their lives in the current crisis. For example, all *Al-Riyadh* interviewee noted that that Twitter allows citizen journalists to have “open and uncontrolled media activity” while two public figures (PF2 and PF3) suggested that CJ acted as a “mirror of society” that was also able to adjust to the reactions of followers (see 0) One example cited was that of a citizen journalist who was able to gain one million views for his tweets about *Vision 2030*. This reflects the views of Napoli (2015), Dredge and Thomas (2009) and Venter (2001), that PI is determined by context and may be explicitly imposed by recognised institutions or more ambiguously by the socio-political norms and values of a nation.

Finding a balance between the government’s desire to retain control of the media and PI is an issue in many societies, and ‘PI’ is a concept that is easily misinterpreted. Consequently, there is a need to constantly evaluate what is in the PI and how this can be achieved by CJ (Dempsey and Gruver, 2012; Jackson, 1997). In the past, traditional media were central in defining what was in the PI (Venter, 2001) and Saudi media were heavily regulated by a government anxious to keep a strict rein on liberal ideas. SM platforms like Twitter have granted CJ a greater role in driving PI in the KSA, and this study has provided data on how and why this has occurred. It is important to make a distinction between ‘PI’ as defined by the Saudi Basic Law of Media which emphasizes that the role of the media is to “strengthen the unity of the nation” and the idea that it is in the PI to be informed about what is happening in the world and to have access to matters about which citizens need knowledge in order to make informed decisions about issues that affect their lives and livelihoods (Rifai, 2014; Happer and Philo, 2013).

In the KSA, ‘PI’ as defined by the editors-in-chief of the traditional media and the state is thus what Napoli terms an ideological device to regulate media, whereas in SM CJ, the PI is defined by the public themselves. As Napoli notes

(2015), this implies that journalists' ethical obligations to the public can be self-determined or imposed by regulation. In the KSA 'freedom of expression' is not clearly defined and editors-in-chief are held responsible for what is published. They therefore decide what it is in the PI to know, but are arguably actually serving their own as well as the state's ideology. In the KSA, publications differ in what they allow to be published. For instance, journalists working for *Al-Watan* can comment on the pronouncements and activities of religious leaders but this is not the case for *Al-Jazirah*. This control by editors-in-chief does not affect CJ on SM platforms like Twitter, which is only subject to state legislation. It should be noted, that even such state legislation can sometimes be circumvented by what Ghannam calls the "backdoors that technology provides" (2011, p.7) and state attempts to limit technology have often been met with sufficient protest to halt these attempts (Jenabi, 2016).

Although all the columnists who were interviewed agreed that citizen journalists are personally responsible for what they write, and should adhere to professional standards when writing on Twitter, they also made it clear that they did not mention or publish any information obtained from the media organization they wrote for when using Twitter and were aware of online publishing regulations issued in 2011 and the 2007 Anti-Cyber Crime Law. The need for ethical behaviour, such as not giving direct financial advice regarding investments, was also mentioned. Public figures also reported following the same regulations and noted that the Saudi Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution and the police had procedures to deal with breaches of these regulations.

Morton and Aroney (2015) suggest that journalists have a subjective interpretation of PI and even more so in the case of CJ on SM. However, this subjective interpretation gives a platform to people who were previously excluded from the public sphere and tackles subjects seen as important by users of these platforms. The term 'CJ' is not fully explained in Saudi media regulations; thus one of the challenges that faces Saudi citizen journalists is that online publication regulations in the KSA are too general to cover all forms of online content and thus cannot be applied to specific content posted on SM.

Clearly, there are concerns about maintaining ethical behaviour in CJ. Addressing this issue, Hamdy (2009) stated that citizen journalists are not

bound by ethical guidelines or press regulations like their professional counterparts, although they should participate in ethical behaviour such as drawing international attention to breaches of human rights. In 2002, Darweesh (2002) reported that there was relatively little legislation governing Internet activities in Arab countries. Regulations relating to online activity in many Arab countries, including the KSA, still do not specifically refer to CJ. Ali (2012) notes that CJ ethics are controlled to some extent by Internet censorship by the state and by self-censorship based on religious taboos. Badawi (2015) advocated the drawing up of charters to control activities on digital media which were more appropriate to the speedy, spontaneous nature of this medium. It remains to be seen who is best to decide what is 'ethical' or otherwise in relation to CJ.

The literature review highlighted the importance of being clear about how PI is defined, as an inadequate definition makes it difficult to assess whether it is being served (Feintuck and Varney, 2006). Exactly what constitutes PI remains a subject of debate. Morrison and Svennevig (2007) note that the idea of 'PI' is used by both regulators and media organisations as a way of justifying intrusions into privacy; and Morton and Aroney (2015) make the point that journalists are not given any rigorous definition of this concept. It is certainly the case that state corruption can be exposed on SM by showing how officials and their families live opulently when ordinary citizens remain in poverty; which demonstrates that CJ facilitates public debate and encourages direct feedback from Twitter users who can discuss matters of the greatest concern to them. It is possible to see CJ on platforms like Twitter as a way for ordinary Saudi citizens to put pressure on their government when the mainstream media cannot do this (Al Saggaf and Simmons, 2015). In the context of exposing corruption, it is arguably possible to see intrusions by the media into private lives as being in the PI, and in Saudi Arabia, CJ on SM is best placed to do this among current media providers.

However, a degree of tension exists between what can be described as being for the general 'common good', which can be presented in objective and visible terms, and what is in the self-interest of particular individuals or groups to present as being in the 'PI' (Berman, 2011; Olejarski, 2011; Anderson, 2014).

In non-democratic countries such as the KSA, CJ focuses on the creation of a public space to discuss issues and public affairs. The aim of CJ is to cover

the problems of society such as corruption, crime and violence, providing accurate information—particularly during times of crisis—to raise awareness of these problems with citizens and encourage them to participate in combating these social ills. It is not enough to simply raise ‘hot’ issues. It is in the PI to go beyond merely describing the problem, and to search for its causes, investigate its consequences and suggest the necessary practical measures in coordination with the concerned authorities, both official and non-official, to solve these problems. This study reveals that this is what happens when, for example, Saudi citizen journalists tweeted and used SM such as YouTube and Snapchat to raise awareness about ‘white lands’ and supported the imposition of a tax on this unused land. Indeed, two columnists (Colms 1 and 4) did this even before the tax was actually imposed. This was highlighted on #White_Lands_Fees when users tweeted this measure was “a victory for the voice of the people” and made comments like “Twitter heroes speaking for the interests of the nation and its citizens have won the battle”.

As well as reflecting the issues seen by the people as PI issues, platforms such as Twitter show what Saudis actually want and expect in relation to these issues (Ristow, 2013). This was highlighted in interview data when one columnist (Colm6) stated that Twitter was a platform that allowed him to post specific views on a wide range of issues that affected Saudi citizens’ lives and livelihoods, such as the housing crisis, the ‘white lands’ tax and political reforms to monitor and evaluate corruption in the public sector among others (see 0).

7.5.1 Economic Issues and Royal Decrees Discussed through Virtual Interaction

Saudi citizen journalists wanting to post content on economic issues they deem to be in the PI can do this more freely on SM than in the Saudi press. This is reflected in the hashtags analysed in this study (i.e. those relating to *Vision 2030*, white lands’ fees and Royal Decrees 2015/16) which have contributed to creating a virtual interactive community that debated these issues. However, it should be noted that after the Qatar crisis of 2017 there were changes in the freedom of expression on Saudi Twitter (see 0). Results from analysis of the data show that Saudi citizen journalists on Twitter are economic specialists who act as sources of information, interacting with their followers and answering their questions. Platforms like Twitter give citizen journalists more freedom of

expression than traditional Saudi media and allow for two-way interaction both locally and globally which shapes the Saudi PI in relation to economic issues and goes some way to overcoming the limits of traditional state control (Al Saggaf, 2006). Furthermore, the anonymity of Twitter allows Saudis an easy and safe forum to discuss sensitive issues.

For example, results from this study regarding questions posed to citizen journalists showed that citizens were keen to know how issues such as the Royal Decrees 2016 would impact both on Saudi society generally and on their own situation. There was a high level of interaction with these tweets, numbering 100 in total. Some tweeters were concerned about the exact nature of government decisions and also wanted to know how these decisions would impact on them personally. For example, T318 was concerned about whether the change from the Islamic to the Gregorian calendar would affect the validity of personal documents. Other questions were tweeted directly to the Minister of Labour and the Recruitment Committee, with T320 asking whether salaries for domestic assistants would also be cut while T322 commented that the 2016 Royal Decrees would have larger, more complex effects on the Saudi economy than small-scale economic analyses could predict. This reflected how CJ generated a perception of which issues were in the PI, stimulated public action around these issues and answered the public's need for information.

Analysis of tweets about the Royal Decrees and economic issues demonstrated that citizens alerted each other to what they considered to be of vital importance. For example, on #Royal_Decrees_2015, the repeated use of phrases such as "hush hush", "the situation of the Saudi people" and "the Saudi nation is awaiting the Royal Decrees", as well as images of people listening, were tweeted to signify what users needed to pay attention to, in other words what citizens believed it was in the PI to pay attention to (see 0). Tweets on this hashtag also criticised the state TV channel (Channel 1) for only being of value to citizens for broadcasting Royal Decrees and there were many jokes and sarcastic comments about its unpopularity. The fact that the direct link to the channel was also tweeted demonstrates further that many Saudis do not normally view this channel, arguably because they believe it does not reflect PI.

Currently in the KSA, citizen journalists on Twitter derive their ideas about what is in the PI from their own knowledge and beliefs, from the feedback

they receive and from what is said during the debates generated by this platform, rather than accepting a definition of this imposed by the authorities. Having identified those issues considered to be in the PI, SM like Twitter create a network of individuals, including specialists on economic issues, that users can select to connect with through public virtual interaction. Analysis of the Twitter data suggests that part of what is seen as being in the PI is the ability to be critical about issues perceived as socially and economically important and that this is reflected in Saudi CJ where a critical stance has become an emerging norm as well as a source of information.

According to Awad (2010), the official list of what should not be published in the 'PI' (see 0) serves the interests of the ultra-conservative religious elite in the KSA who can control the traditional media and ensure that sanctions are taken against anyone who transgresses. Alotaibi (2017) cites examples of this (see 0) and Alzaharani (2016) mentions closures of online-only publications due to the enforcement of the Executive Regulations for Electronic Publication; however, as yet no references have been made in the regulations to CJ. Furthermore, some of the seven prohibitions listed by Awad (2010) (see 0) refer to the PI, but they are broadly outlined without any details. As one interviewee noted, media policy in the KSA has 'red lines' and each newspaper also has its own 'red lines' related to its ideology. Twitter provides a space to discuss some of the points that are listed by Awad (2010). Online publishing rules have not been established in detail and remain unclear for users. This lack of clarity makes it difficult to have any official definition of what it is in the PI to post and not to post on platforms like Twitter (see discussion of PI and CJ in **Error! Reference source not found.**).

For example, #Royal_Decrees_2016 yielded data that demonstrated questions about related economic issues were posed to expert citizen journalists, like Al Zamel and Burjus al Burjus, who responded clearly and informatively (see 0). However, the extent to which citizen journalists have full access to government information remains unclear and it could be argued that there is some sensitive information which should not be released. Thus, in this sense, the ultimate decision about what information should be accessible in the PI with regard to economic policy remains with those who have control over that information. In such cases, Saudi CJ can only serve the PI by demanding that

such information be released and making the case for more transparency. This shows that the Saudi government does pay attention to the power of Twitter and disseminates its news through CJ, in turn creating an open dialogue between citizens and the authorities. It can of course be argued that by engaging with citizens on platforms like Twitter, the government is retaining a powerful presence in this arena. Indeed, Cammaerts suggests that political and cultural elites appear to be taking over SM (2008, p.366). The current study has noted that, in the period considered, this appeared to be starting in the KSA as the Saudi government established its own hashtag about the Saudi Vision 2030. However, this did not detract from the PICJ about economic issues that was undoubtedly present in the hashtags analysed.

7.5.2 Royal Decrees as an Indicator of Saudi PI

The phrase 'Breaking News: Royal Decrees to be Announced Shortly' has always gathered Saudis in front of their TVs waiting for a broadcast from Saudi Channel 1. Even though they can now choose from a wide variety of channels, this channel remains the primary reference for Saudi citizens regarding the announcement of Royal Decrees.

Due to their importance for Saudi citizens, Royal Decrees have a large following on Twitter. #Royal_Decrees has become a trend in the KSA since June 9 2017 and receives the highest level of interaction among Saudis, even if actual Royal Decrees are not announced on this hashtag which also does not provide any official or semi-official news regarding these announcements (Arabic RT, 2017). It is also clear that this hashtag provides false news promoted through certain organized accounts working on the Twitter website. A number of citizen journalists explained that none of the information it carried came from the Saudi Royal Court or the Saudi Press Agency (SPA). The latter announces the broadcast of new Royal Decrees hours before they are actually issued, as was the case for those Royal Decrees announced by King Salman in April 2016. The implications of this were outlined by some of the professional journalists who when interviewed said that it was essential that CJ on Twitter needed to maintain its credibility and that precautions needed to be taken as to the authenticity of posts (see 0).

Twitter data analysis demonstrates the major importance of Royal Decrees to the Saudi people. Levels of activity on the hashtag related to these decrees increase when decrees are announced, becoming a trend on the regional stage. The researcher found that although the 2015 decrees were announced at 9:00 pm and the 2016 decrees at 12:00 midnight they still produced a lot of traffic from Saudi tweeters, indicating the national importance of these events.

Economic issues and economic news have been at the forefront of Saudi society's interests since 2014 (the year in which the price of oil—the sole source of income for the Saudi economy—plummeted). Economic crisis followed and the impact of this began to make its presence felt on the lives of Saudi citizens. In addition, other factors such as Royal Decrees and economic issues are currently at the forefront of Saudi society's interests due to their impact on the lives of citizens. Such issues have included the rise in prices of fuel, electricity and water, as well as tax increases.

This research has attempted to fill the knowledge gap, apparent from a review of existing literature, about how Saudi CJ on Twitter reflects the PI; focusing particularly how this happens during a period of economic crisis in the KSA. Based on the results of the above analysis of data from interviews and hashtags presented in Chapter 5 (0) and Chapter 6 (0), an explanatory model of PICJ in the KSA has been created to provide a better understanding of how this phenomenon works, fulfilling objective 4 of the research (see 0).

7.6 The PICJ (KSA) Model –Towards a Better Understanding of PICJ in the KSA

The purpose of the model is to identify the features of PICJ in the KSA and provide an illustration of the ways in which it functions.

A review of the existing literature has highlighted how media regulation in the KSA and the absence of investigative journalism practice in the Saudi traditional press have influenced the emergence of CJ in the KSA, mainly through Twitter. The lack of trust of ordinary citizens in the ability of traditional media to address PI issues has also been a key factor in the rise of Saudi CJ. If CJ is to succeed as a viable alternative to traditional media, it must continue to

develop. CJ in the KSA can be defined as "journalism by individuals", which is to mean that it covers issues that are important to citizens and interprets economic events; it is "the mirror of society's concerns". It can be "populist journalism", touching on the issues affecting ordinary citizens, or "civic journalism", focusing on situations and problems involving citizens (see comments from O(Prof1), J(Prof3) *Al-Watan* interviewees). During the economic crisis in the KSA, CJ also played a vital role in educating Saudi citizens about key economic concepts by providing detailed but accessible information (see comments from Colm9, Colm8, Colm4, and Colm6). Saudi PI can be defined as being informed about what is happening in the world and having access to those matters about which citizens need knowledge in order to make informed decisions about issues that affect their lives. This definition highlights the fact that CJ and PI in the KSA are closely correlated. PICJ, then, refers to any journalistic content (produced using multimedia and published on platforms such as Twitter) that conveys the complaints of Saudi citizens about poor service by government. This highlights how CJ on Twitter serves needs and requirements of the citizens, and therefore how it serves PI. Ghannam (2011) argues that citizen journalists in the Arab using platforms like Twitter would act as watchdogs of government activity, with the digital media fulfilling the role that traditional media fails to do by holding the government accountable.

Freedom of expression on Twitter allows citizen journalists to raise economic issues and post content based on their specialist knowledge of economic affairs and their sense of social responsibility, and to respond to the concerns and questions of the users. The Royal Decrees which are announced by the king are of vital concern to Saudis, and as such they stimulate CJ and virtual interaction on platforms like Twitter. Instant communication is essential to Twitter users in times of crisis when a ready access to information becomes particularly valuable.

After identifying the features of PICJ in the KSA context from the evidence gathered, these features was used as the basis of a model of the practice of PICJ (for economic issues) in the KSA, which is discussed below.

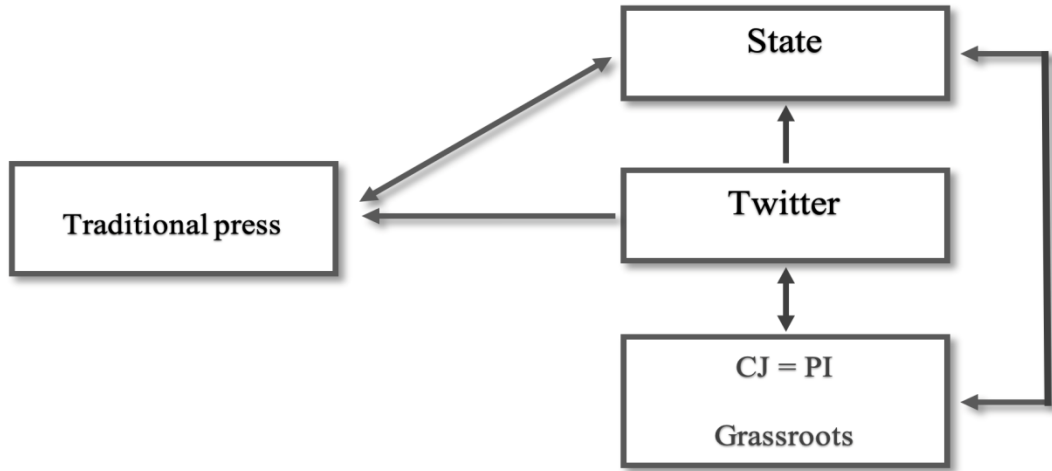
Based on the findings of the current study, there appear to be two types of CJ practised in the KSA. One is what Wall (2015) referred to as 'technologies of the Self(ie)'. This type of CJ involves ordinary citizens posting multimedia

content and documenting events directly; when this content is posted on platforms like Twitter, this content then trends in the top hashtags in the KSA, making these issues become topical matters of public opinion that are discussed among Saudis online. This may then lead to the government taking some form of action to resolve the issue. The traditional press then cover these issues, as it often looks to CJ as a source of information. The current study's analysis of Twitter data revealed that traditional media frequently used content they obtained from CJ. For example, Saudi TV talk shows, such as Al Arabiya's *Tafa'olokom* (Your Interaction), have been known to use trending hashtags as their source material. In general, the common feature of this type of CJ practice by individual citizens is exposing bad service by government organizations or employees (see Section 5.6.8.4 for examples) and PI stories (see Section 5.4.7).

The traditional press in the KSA represents the views of officials more than those of citizens and it gives a lot of space to events such as dignitaries carrying out their duties (interviewee PF2), and thus fails to realistically capture what the day to day life is like for most people who live in the KSA.

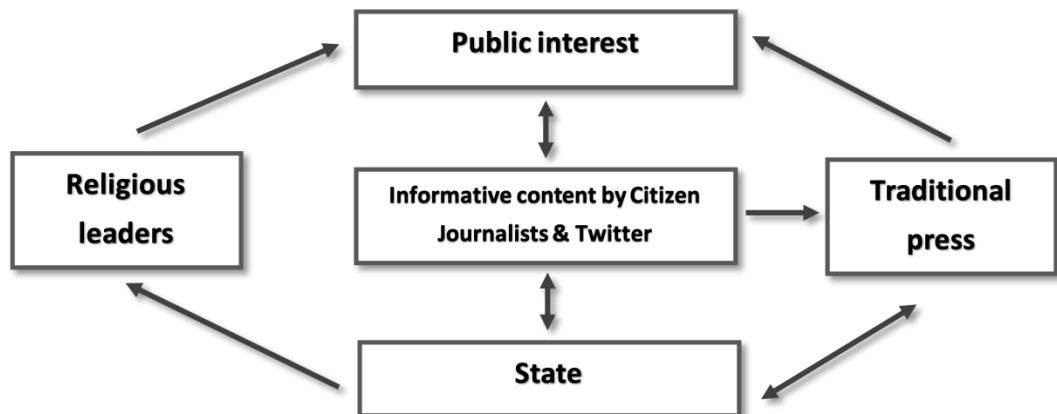
The fact that Twitter facilitates public discourse may account for Twitter's rapid growth in the KSA, a country that is arguably one of the most conservative and secluded societies in the world (Al-Jenaibi, 2016). Public dialogue is enriched when people from all backgrounds and with very different perspectives can interact. Platforms like Twitter have had a profound effect in enabling open criticism towards the government, a practice that was previously considered taboo (Worth, 2012, p.1) The traditional press covers issues after they have trended on Twitter because there is no real investigative journalism in the KSA. As Alnasar (2015) asserts, the 'technologies of the Self(ie)' that Wall (2015) refers to are evident in Twitter. Thus, the findings of the current research (interview data) shows that, CJ, PI, and the technologies of the Self(ie) are closely correlated in the KSA. This is illustrated in PICJ model 1 (Figure 7.3).

Figure 0.3: PICJ in the KSA : Model 1



The second type of CJ in the KSA occurs at times of economic crisis, when it is clearly in the PI for citizens to be provided with the information they require. This role should be performed by journalists. However, the traditional press in the KSA is controlled by media regulation and by the state, by religion, and by the conservative nature of traditional culture (Alnajrani et al., 2018). A model of PICJ in the KSA has been created by analysing how CJ operates in the context of Saudi Twitter hashtags, specifically those which relate to economic issues, and then combining this with in-depth insights from the interviews. CJ and PI influence each other, as indicated by the two-way arrow in the model (see figure 7.4). PI is shaped by government regulation (in the form of Royal Decrees) and policy (for example, *Vision 2030*), and by Saudi citizens themselves. Information and open discussion about PI events such as the issue of Royal Decrees are facilitated by CJ on platforms like Twitter.

Figure 0.4: PICJ in the KSA: Model 2



Chapter 7 highlighted that this model is based on informative content generated by citizen journalists who specialise in economic matters, and who address issues of PI through CJ on Twitter where they can more freely express their views. Twitter also supports CJ by allowing citizen journalists to instantly post tweets, providing up-to-speed information and explanations supplemented by links to video, text, infographics, and their own economic articles (see Section 0). Moreover, the level of freedom of expression that Twitter allows facilitates the discussion of issues often not covered in the traditional press, such as government regulation and policy. The importance of this was highlighted when thousands of Saudis protested against the government when it tried to introduce legislation with harsh penalties for using social media with intent ‘to harm public order or religious values’. Following the protest, the government had to back down, and, to this day, Twitter remains a forum for discussing controversial issues like women’s rights and racism (Almazroui, 2012).

In addition, Twitter’s innate interactivity enables citizen journalists to interact with users by answering their questions and increasing their awareness about the economic crisis (see 0), unlike traditional Saudi media which use SM only as a one-way communication channel. This emphasises how these citizen journalists are not news providers in a traditional sense; rather, they inform citizens and help them to raise their economic awareness and to make informed judgement in times of economic crisis. This was highlighted in the interview data (see Section 0), especially when Colm1 made the comparison between what he

believed to be the difference in the levels of economic awareness found in articles published in the traditional press and information posted by citizen journalists, claiming this was like “comparing the understanding of a first-grader with that of a graduate”. A further example can be found in the Twitter data (see 0) in which the citizen journalists explain how the ‘white lands’ tax will work and why it will have a positive impact on house ownership and on the housing crisis. The Saudi press only offered the official state view to citizens, and this is one of the reasons CJ emerged on Twitter as a source of information. Prof1 stated that he relied on CJ written on Twitter by specialists in economics¹⁰⁶. The fact that citizen journalists have the freedom to discuss issues that cannot be covered in the Saudi press is undeniable. Prof2 confirmed that this was the case with the ‘white lands’ issue, adding that certain citizen journalists even obtained inside information from official sources. This evidence demonstrates that Saudi citizen journalists interact with their readers as co-participants in public affairs rather than as passive receivers, as they are not just posting information about economic issues but also highlighting how Saudis can act on their concerns about economic issues and facilitating an effective, interactive public discussion. This is clear in online discussion that involves an ideological debate that was absent in the traditional press, which just provides official and state views (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4.3). Twitter gives CJ the power to create a channel between the state and citizens (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.3.1). Also, the evidence generated by the interviews suggests that citizen journalists set an agenda for the traditional press, as there is reference made to how CJ content is used as material by the traditional media; for example PF1’s statement that ‘countless’ tweets of his had made their way into press reports and talk shows.

Arguably, the reported evidence reveals that CJ in the KSA has influenced the nature of the traditional press, as the latter now shows signs of keeping pace with technological developments and social media. For example, many traditional press organisations have Twitter accounts that their journalists use in lieu of their personal accounts. These organisational accounts appear to just post news and to not interact with the citizens. This suggests that the traditional

¹⁰⁶ Abdul Hamid Al Amri, Essam Al Zamel, Mohammed Al Anqarai, and Rashid Al Fozan all write about economic affairs in the Saudi press and are influential on social networks.

press are still maintaining control over decisions about what is in the public interest, rather than allowing citizens themselves to participate in shaping PI. Interview and Twitter data emphasise that the system of censorship in the Saudi press resulted in the formation of CJ. Also, professional journalists highlighted that whereas in the traditional press bureaucratic procedures often delay the publication of news, a citizen journalist can respond to events instantly (Y(Prof2)). Examples of this were given by PF2, who was frustrated by the “unreasonable control” exercised by his editor-in-chief, who prevented him from publishing many of his articles, and by E(Prof1) who noted that crucial issues in the public interest like the ‘white lands’ tax were not properly covered in the Saudi press. Both these interviewees believed that CJ on Twitter could provide better information than traditional media could (see 0).

Religious leaders who support state decisions and regulations tweet religious messages to encourage users to obey the government and the Royal Decrees, thus exerting power over media contents. Largely as a result of pressure from Saudi clerics, sanctions are taken against journalists and editors who are deemed ‘too liberal’; in some cases, such sanctions result in newspapers being closed or TV programmes being banned (Alotaibi, 2017). The thousands of re-tweets and the high number of likes and interactions that these tweets from religious leaders receive also attests to their power (see 0). The Twitter data analysed in this research revealed that Saudi users frequently share religious content and many of them believe that God rewarded them for doing so. In the hashtags related to the Royal Decrees of 2015 and 2016 and to Saudi Vision 2030, some tweets were found to include religious content such as verses from the *Qur’an* and *Hadith* that supported the decisions. One such tweet received a staggering 1553 re-tweets, 954 likes, and 76 interactions, all of which offered prayers for the country's security and swore allegiance to the King. The fact that Twitter is also used to issue *fatwas* (advisory warnings by a Saudi *mufti*) also highlights the role of religious leaders and in supporting state decisions. Religious leaders have a strong influence on Saudis and many are skilful at attracting followers on social media platforms like Twitter, especially young Saudis. Stanger, Alnaghaimshi, and Pearson (2017) confirm that religion plays an important role in the way Saudis interact on social media, and that sharing religious contents is seen as compatible with Islamic values.

The complete picture of SM in the KSA, then, sees the traditional press and the clerics supporting the official views of the State, and citizen journalists supporting the voice of the citizens through Twitter. The Saudi government has begun to pay attention to the power of Twitter, and also to convey its own news through CJ, and by doing so it opened an unofficial channel of communication to create a more open dialogue between citizens and the authorities. The government can see what citizens are concerned about by viewing campaign hashtags such as those demanding that the government provide jobs or urging citizens to boycott Saudi chicken because of price increases (Al-Jenaibi, 2016).

Both PICJ models (1 and 2) highlight the role of CJ in shaping PI; each model shows the factors which explain how the traditional press does not represent Saudi PI. While religious leaders appear in PICJ Model 2 (since they support state decisions), they do not feature in Model 1. Freedom of expression on Twitter influences the shape of PICJ in the KSA. The current research focuses on the type of CJ that flourishes in a time of crisis by providing informative content and interacting with users to raise awareness about said economic crisis. This type of CJ is practiced by columnists and public figures with experience in economic affairs who use Twitter as a platform for tweeting comments and updating citizens about economic subjects, while professional journalists use Twitter to post on economic matters as PI journalists.

7.7 Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the following main points:

1. The increased popularity of Twitter and other social networks has resulted in significant changes to freedom of the press and freedom of expression they have become a focus for a more democratic way of deciding what is in the PI and have promoted the rights of ordinary citizens to make their voices heard. Citizens have been drawn to these networks which are easy to use, requiring minimal technical experience and financial cost. SM have also contributed to increasing press freedom in Saudi media outlets by raising previously taboo topics. However, Saudi media still abide by restrictions on expressing ideas that do not conform to state media policy. CJ is an inevitable outcome of the absence of independent journalism and

government control on Saudi media, which expresses the views of officials not citizens. This study has shown that Saudi CJ takes different forms—as posts by columnists, public figures and ordinary citizens, but regarding the relative freedom these citizen journalists enjoy and the provision of content that is in the PI, they share many common features.

2. On the Saudi hashtags analysed in this study, CJ on Twitter appeared to be more likely to be backed up by statistical evidence from credible sources and was more interactive than traditional media, probably because it operates without any clearly defined ownership. Editorial policy, in its conventional form, is absent from this platform and, therefore, CJ is relatively free from pressures to adopt a particular stand about any specific issue. Most studies conducted on public usage of SM concluded that interactivity is an essential and distinctive aspect of new media and one of the key differences between it and traditional print media. This research has taken this further; although it focuses on PI related to economic matters, specifically in the context of Saudi CJ on Twitter. It provides evidence which addresses the knowledge gap by creating a model of PICJ.
3. The public want in-depth accurate information at times of crisis. This became clear during the KSA's economic crisis when citizen journalists with specialist knowledge and experience played a vital role in responding to queries and providing economic material. This helped to build trust between the citizen journalists and their followers. They also helped create an interactive atmosphere by presenting suggestions and ideas about unfolding economic events. This practice is absent in Saudi media, which rely on a single channel to transmit their message. Economic news coverage through Saudi media Twitter accounts was limited to publishing news without interacting with recipients. This led citizens to rely on citizen journalists because they responded promptly and consistently to queries about how the economic crisis would affect the lives of ordinary citizens.
4. Poor economic coverage in the Saudi media is possibly the result of its failure. Most of those interviewed in this study sample have academic degrees unrelated to Economic Studies (see 0). Saudi newspapers employ relatively few full-time journalists, which leads to poor content being published. The Saudi media environment also fails to encourage talented journalists to investigate stories more objectively, due to the restrictions

imposed on them by their newspapers and the long procedures that prevent them from achieving journalistic excellence (see 0). For these reasons, expert economists express their views and explain economic issues to ordinary citizens using their Twitter accounts. Interviewees stressed the need to ensure credibility when posting economic news and gave several examples of newspapers which had published erroneous news on their Twitter accounts without confirmation (see 0).¹⁰⁷

5. The results also demonstrate that the more a tweet is re-tweeted, the greater its perceived significance, either because it strikes a chord with individuals or contains information judged to be important, leading to a high level of interaction and opinion sharing. Several studies (Kraidy, 2013; Awad, 2010; Al-Qarni, 2004; Al Ghothami, 2016) have discussed the impact of new media in the KSA and this study has shown that Saudi audiences are switching allegiance from traditional media to new sources of information such as CJ on Twitter.

This research has shed light on the foundation of CJ in a non-democratic country (the KSA), where the traditional press is controlled by the state and it has achieved the aim of providing a better understanding of the manifestations of—and relationships between—PI and CJ in the KSA. Citizen journalists are specialists who produce informative tweets and need to have the space for freedom of expression provided by SM which allows them to cover economic news in more detail than the traditional press. Although the KSA is not a democracy and is based on very different social, religious, political and cultural features to those of Western democracies, these actions by citizen journalists can arguably be described as ‘democratic’, in the sense that they act as a conduit for the voices of ordinary citizens who wish to make their feelings known to the authorities. As we have seen, their demands are sometimes listened to and acted upon by the government.

¹⁰⁷ *Okaz* and *Al Madinah* were heavily criticised for publishing the news of the dismissal of Abdullah bin Musa’ed, the Head of Youth and Sports Agency, on their official Twitter accounts without confirming this. *Al-Eqtisadiyah* also published incorrect facts about sales of Aramco shares which led to them facing legal questioning. Interviewees from *Okaz* also mentioned the circulation of incorrect news on Twitter which created a black market for cigarettes. *Al-Yaum* journalists noted with concern the leaking of official documents on Twitter.

This study set out to explore CJ in the KSA and its relation to SM (Twitter in particular) and PI, drawing upon theories of CJ and the existing literature. In the Saudi context, CJ is an arena in which journalists are free to interpret PI without the constraints that imposed on the traditional media. CJ on platforms such as Twitter therefore forms an active part of the public sphere in the KSA. This study, combining qualitative and quantitative data analysis, has provided more detailed insights into the workings of Saudi CJ than any other previous study. The model of PICJ in the KSA highlights the importance of the use of a platform like Twitter which can afford the freedom of expression and interactivity needed to create a journalism which reflects PI better than the heavily censored and top-down traditional press. The level of interest from Saudi citizens created by the hashtags in relation to the economic issues chosen in this study has highlighted the importance of being able to access an alternative source of information about government economic policies and reforms which constitute issues of PI. Nevertheless, evidence from the study has shown that there are limitations on the extent to which CJ on Twitter can deliver PI content. For example, interviewee PF2 commented on the poor quality of the material used in Saudi media, illustrating this with a personal anecdote (see 0) and other interviewees expressed their concerns about some Twitter postings being fake news or citizen journalists self-censoring (see 0).

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This research has explored the nature and functions of citizen journalism (CJ) in the non-Western setting of Saudi Arabia (the KSA) and placed CJ within the framework of Saudi PI. Having completed the literature review, it was noted that, first, there is a lack of research conducted on CJ in the KSA (see 0), since most of the existing research on this topic has focused either on neighbouring countries, such as Egypt, or on the Arab Spring events. Secondly, this work has tended to place the analysis of the topic within a political-rather than an economic - framework. This concluding chapter to the thesis begins by briefly summarising the key findings. The focus then shifts to evaluating the extent to which the research objectives were achieved and the significance of the findings related to these objectives. The significance of the model based on the findings of this study that provides a better understanding of PICJ in the KSA (set out in the previous chapter) is then discussed before the limitations of the study are addressed. The chapter concludes with a series of recommendations relevant to future research in this area.

8.1 Key Findings

In the non-democratic context of the KSA, Twitter has provided a platform for CJ and given Saudi citizens the opportunity to interact with citizen journalists, express their views and concerns, have questions about key socio-economic matters answered, enter into debate with each other and also have their views represented to the authorities.

Interactivity and informative content are two of the most important features of CJ with Twitter enabling the audience to interact with PI topics. In its literature review, this thesis explored a concept proposed by Wall (2015), explained in her article 'Technologies of the Self(ie): Social Media and the Individual Citizen Journalist'. This type of CJ involves ordinary people posting their own version of events on social media, and these are often contrasted with the official version (see 0). It was found that although this type of citizen journalist differed from the public figures who were active on Saudi Twitter, as PI journalists post on hot issues while citizen journalists are specialists in

economic issues who write about topics related to their personal knowledge. There were some interesting similarities since both provided an alternative view of events to that of the mainstream media and they encouraged ordinary citizens to enter into debate about issues of concern. These features of public figures on Saudi Twitter were explored, as well as the ways in which they were used as sources by professional journalists, offering insights into the emergence of Saudi CJ at a time of financial crisis.

There is evidence that the traditional Saudi press increasingly depends on citizen journalists' tweets and posts, and circulates this information. Many of these citizen journalists are specialists in their field and provide high quality information which censorship precludes the traditional press from covering. Findings from this study confirm the assertion by Sienkiewicz (2014) that sometimes there are two tiers of CJ working together to change how information is disseminated in the public sphere. In our case, this is demonstrated by the example in which citizen journalists on Twitter (the first tier) reported the slapping of a photographer by a high-ranking aide of the Saudi monarch (see 0). When the story was picked by the mainstream media (the second tier), in this case, *Gulf News*, the story gained such momentum that it resulted in the aide's dismissal.

There is also evidence of the fact that, in certain instances, CJ may adopt an agenda-setting function for the traditional media in the KSA (see 0). Evidence from this study suggests that because CJ focuses on an active audience that provides immediate feedback, this has, in part, empowered the public to set media agendas. As such this study has also provided an interesting perspective on agenda-setting theory.

Current official online regulations were intended to cover online publications not information disseminated on interactive SM apps, a fact that currently affords CJ on Twitter more freedom of expression.

8.2 Research Contribution

The current study is the first to focus on CJ using economic issues as case studies rather than political ones in the context of the KSA. Relatively few studies have analysed actual Twitter content to explain how the online public sphere operates in non-democratic countries. Analysis of the Twitter data has

shown how applying an in-depth qualitative methodology of thematic analysis to data derived from a SM platform produces useful insights into the issues that users are interested in and the ways in which they choose to express that interest. This has possible implications for researchers wishing to analyse data from SM platforms in more depth.

- The study also contributes to documenting and discussing Saudi PICJ, evaluating its positive and negative aspects in the light of the theories reviewed about CJ and PI and relating these to the Saudi context, suggesting ways in which it could be further explored' (see 0). It achieves this by analysing Twitter as a platform for interaction between Saudi citizen journalists and their followers concerning crucial economic issues and provides new evidence of how and to what extent citizen journalists use Twitter to shape Saudi PI on these issues.
- This research has produced an evidence-based model of PICJ in the KSA drawing on data from multiple sources. The current study highlights features of CJ in the KSA to provide a better understanding of Saudi PI and explains how this model works in a context of state-controlled traditional media.
- Given the changing nature of the phenomenon, this study has provided a detailed picture of Saudi CJ on Twitter related to important economic issues at a particular time in Saudi history. The study serves as a chronicle of how CJ on Twitter served the public interest at that time in an economic, cultural, and legal context.

8.3 Research Questions

The current study has highlighted four research questions that were connected to research objectives; the contributions that answering these questions made to the objectives are shown below:

- **Question One** required that the researcher identify the factors that have led to the rise of CJ in the KSA. The answers of the participants contributed to mapping out how CJ is conceptualised in the KSA and to determine how this differs from the conceptualisations of CJ found in

Western literature. Participants also provided insights into the role played by citizen journalists and the influence they have had in the KSA and in the wider geographical region;

- **Question Two** led to an examination of the PI element of CJ in the Saudi context and aimed at providing the basis of an explanatory model of PICJ for economic issues in the KSA. This question is linked to Objective Two – to show the nature and function of public interest in relation to Saudi journalism. Answering Question Two revealed how PI is manifested in Saudi CJ on Twitter and how this occurred during a time of economic crisis. As a result of the analysis of the hashtags and interviews (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.7, and Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1), an explanatory model of PICJ in Saudi Arabia was developed which allows a clearer understanding of the phenomenon (see Chapter 7, Section 7.5).
- **Question Three** was designed to provide detailed insights into the attitudes of Saudi professional and non-professional journalists towards CJ. Questions One and Three highlighted the factors related to the emergence of CJ in the KSA (Objective One). Thus, Objective One is linked to the answers to Research Questions One and Three, which highlighted the factors that led to the emergence of CJ in the KSA. The answer to Question One reveals the factors that led to the rise of CJ in the KSA. These factors are explained in Chapter 7, which focuses on answering the Research Questions. This study identifies factors that influence CJ in non-democratic states like the KSA, namely: freedom of expression, informative content as a source of information, and channels of communication with government. The answer to Question Three reveals the how Saudi professional journalists and citizens perceive and relate to citizen journalists; it explores how Saudi citizen journalists create CJ that raises economic awareness and sets an agenda for the traditional media (see Chapter 7, Sections 7.2 and 7.3).
- **Question Four** led to the establishment of the role played by Twitter in the development and articulation of CJ in the KSA. This question was linked to Objective Three - the role played by Twitter in articulating and developing CJ in the KSA. This supports a better comprehension of the manifestations of, and relationship between, public interest and citizen

journalism in the KSA by creating a model of PICJ for economic issues in the KSA, which was linked to Objective Four. Answering Question Four revealed how Twitter links CJ to PI, and in particular it revealed what characteristics of Twitter facilitate the generation of informative and discursive content during an economic crisis. Evidence from the data analysis performed suggests that the behaviour of the Saudi hashtags selected shows that Saudi citizens were looking to CJ for information; in this sense, their opinions may have been influenced by the content in those hashtags, although the contributions of some of the users would suggest they already had a reasonable awareness of economic issues (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4) .

8.4 Research Objectives

This study identified four research objectives (see 0) to realise its aim, which was to provide a better understanding of the manifestations of, and relationships between PI and CJ in the KSA. The following sub-sections summarise the extent to which the research objectives were achieved and the implications of the findings:

8.4.1 Objective 1: To Chart and Explain the Emergence of CJ in the KSA

Analysis of the interview and Twitter data collected at the peak of the KSA's economic crisis identified the following key themes of the relatively new phenomenon of CJ:

- The freedom of expression afforded by Twitter has both facilitated the emergence of CJ and increased its popularity in the context of a non-democratic country like the KSA. This was evidenced by the Twitter data collected, where the level of criticism aimed at Royal Decrees (see 0) and members of the royal family and religious leaders (see 0 and 0) would not have been possible in a traditional press which is strictly controlled by the state and editors-in-chief and subject to the financial pressures exerted by powerful advertisers. Saudi citizens' thirst for information about the potential impact of key economic issues on their lives at a time of financial crisis, explained the

popularity of the CJ found on the hashtags analysed in this study. Interviewees confirmed the importance of CJ as a source of specialist economic information (see 0) and the samples provided ample evidence of how citizens used Twitter to acquire this from citizen journalists (see 0).

- This interactivity allowed citizen journalists not only to act as providers of information but also to act as conduits of information between Saudi citizens and the state. Evidence of this can be seen in the Twitter data when citizen journalists were thanked by users for championing their rights (see 0) and where interviewees confirmed that citizen journalists considered to be experts were often amongst the first to know about important economic developments (see 0). Some were even invited by the government to attend meetings on these issues (see 0).

Thus, objective one has been achieved, by demonstrating how the emergence of CJ in the KSA has been facilitated by Twitter by virtue of two key factors: freedom of expression and interactivity. The power of this phenomenon has also been acknowledged by those in power in the KSA, who seek to curb activities on platforms like Twitter which they believe endanger the position of the state and religious authorities (see 0).

8.4.2 Objective 2: To Establish the Nature and Function of Public Interest in Relation to Saudi Journalism

The current study demonstrates that citizen journalists played an important role in helping ordinary Saudi citizens to better understand the issues surrounding the economic crisis in the KSA. These are issues that many Saudis consider to be in the PI but which the traditional press cannot or will not tackle. The emergence of CJ has both helped to satisfy the need for information and shaped PI in the process.

A review of KSA-related literature highlighted how PI is defined in Saudi journalism by state regulations and how this has changed historically (see 0). Four principles have shaped Saudi regulations about what should and should not be made known to citizens; namely Islamic values, Arab socio-cultural

values, the Saudi political system, and what is perceived to be in the national interest. An exploration of these factors provided insights into how traditional Saudi journalism is made to adhere to established norms and values regarding which constitutes PI (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Censorship regulations contained in the Printed Materials and Publication Law (PMPL) have evolved over time, but essentially they can still be used to prevent publication of material which is unwelcome to the authorities, serves to promote the interests of ultra-conservative religious leaders and does not just to protect what the authorities identify as being in the PI. The Executive Regulations for Electronic Publication (EREP) also act as check on which individuals can be involved in journalism (including e-publications) and can limit access to news about issues that relate to the PI. Changes in the articles of law can shape how the public perceive PI in relation to journalism and have also led to the rise of SM as a popular alternative platform for CJ, which allows Saudis to exchange information and views on issues they consider to be in the PI (see 0). Saudi citizen journalists use SM to focus on issues that concern their immediate communities, and are also concerned about reporting Saudi news that does not get covered elsewhere.

Saudi citizens are increasingly voicing their opinions about state-controlled national media; and this was evidenced in the findings of this study by both the Twitter data (see 0 and 0 where there are examples of tweets that complain about state-controlled media by criticizing the religious authorities and the royal family) as well as the interviews with several columnists and public figures (see 0). Interestingly, Twitter was identified as raising issues which the press was then freer to write about. This has impacted on what is perceived to be newsworthy within the KSA. Saudi citizens are increasingly voicing their opinions about state-controlled national media, as for example, the public reaction to Badawi's incarceration demonstrates (Wood, 2015).

At the end of 2014, a national economic crisis meant Saudi journalism was faced with the need not only to provide informative, objective coverage for citizens affected by this, but also to ensure they reflected what officials wanted citizens to know. The columnists interviewed for this study highlighted that in this climate of crisis citizens lacked confidence in official media coverage of the effects of this crisis, and pointed to the lack of transparency in dealing with

news on the part of official and government authorities. Professional journalists were also of the opinion that SM discussed economic issues such as the 'white lands' tax more freely than the traditional press which only published the opinions of state officials (see interview. with PF1, 0).

Thematic analysis of content on Twitter also illuminated the role of PI within the context of Saudi journalism; and analysis of the hashtags selected for the study showed that Saudi citizen journalists raised and discussed issues of PI not covered by the traditional press. These issues are briefly discussed in terms of the issue of PI below:

'White Lands' Tax

As previously noted, the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a small sector of Saudi society has transformed land into a valuable source of wealth (Aboud, 2015). Building on these currently undeveloped 'white lands' is considered to be one of the key solutions to solving the long-standing housing crisis in the KSA and which affects a large sector of Saudi society (see 0). Analysis showed that CJ creates online public conversations that allow citizens to express their views freely and raise concerns about issues that affect them deeply. Discussion of this topic was previously considered taboo in traditional media outlets because the owners of these 'white lands' were either members of the Royal Family or powerful businessmen (see 0). However, after the issue was raised on Twitter by citizen journalists and became a major topic of discussion, other Saudi media also felt able to report on this.

Royal Decrees 2015/2016

During the period 2015-2016 a number of Royal Decrees were issued to introduce economic reforms intended to respond to the financial crisis that the KSA faced at the end of 2014 due to falling oil prices. Analysis of Twitter data highlighted the important role that Royal Decrees play in Saudi life (see 0), reflected in the volume of online interaction that revealed participants' opinions about the economic decisions contained in the Royal Decrees, which were particularly negative in 2016 (see 0). The traditional press, however, continued its usual practice of simply announcing the Decrees and as one interviewee (PF1) commented, reporting of this kind could only reflect issues of importance to the community from the official perspective. PF1 went on to say something very telling in relation to the nature and function of PI in relation to Saudi

journalism, stating that the reality discussed on Twitter was 'a totally different world' to the one discussed in the traditional media. This suggests that these two 'worlds' view the nature of PI in different ways, with the digital public sphere of SM like Twitter interpreting this in a much freer way than the rigidly controlled 'world' of traditional media.

Vision 2030

This new strategic vision will guide the KSA's policy on unemployment and the housing crisis, issues which affect a large sector of Saudi society. Analysis of the content on the hashtag Saudi Vision 2030 (see 0) showed that Saudis were eager to understand the implications of this new national plan. However, newspapers are not always represented at important events like the launch of *Vision 2030* with the newspaper *Al-Riyadh* noting that although details of *Vision 2030* were broadcast on the *Al-Arabiya* news channel, Prince Mohammed bin Salman did not adequately brief the traditional press (see 0).

Therefore, the second objective has been achieved with the findings of the study providing an insight into how PI is construed differently by CJ on Twitter and more freely than in the traditional Saudi media.

8.4.3 Objective 3: To Determine the Role Played by Twitter in Articulating and Developing CJ in the KSA

The features that make Twitter particularly well suited for CJ in the Saudi context are highlighted by the level of freedom of expression that Twitter enables and by the quality of the content generated by citizen journalists. Furthermore, CJ on platforms like Twitter is also facilitating contact between citizens and the government. This was highlighted in the results of the study. On Twitter, individuals are not only able to gain information that cannot be obtained from mainstream media, but they can also exercise their right to freedom of speech by openly discussing issues that affect them. As a result, Twitter is no longer merely a media platform: it has evolved into a virtual community. Twitter now provides Arab users with a free, safe space to discuss matters of public interest, and it has become a platform characterised by heated debate (see 0). Many studies indicate that Internet users, especially young citizens of Gulf States, rely on SM networks as a primary means of communicating, expressing

ideas, and obtaining information. Citizen journalists also rely on Twitter as their principal means of communicating their ideas and sharing their opinions on political, economic, and social issues concerning all facets of society. Evidence of this was obtained in the interviews recorded for this study, in which columnists stated that CJ on SM like Twitter on economic issues was informative, well-balanced, and less restricted than in the traditional press, leading Saudis to turn to it for information and to voice their concerns (see Section 0). Interviewees from *Al-Jazeera* also complained that some economic issues were not sufficiently explained in the traditional press, and one of them (Prof2) stated that the fact that CJ on Twitter covered the 'white lands' tax issue, occasionally by getting information from official institutions, prompted the traditional press to also pick up on this subject (see 0). This suggests that Twitter can also act as a conduit the leakage of information from official sources via citizen journalists.

Twitter is characterized by a higher level of privacy and data security than other competing social networks such as Facebook, as it provides a documented account option, which is better at preventing the theft of intellectual property and the forging of fake accounts than other networks. This is especially important users who come from the Gulf region who live in highly conservative societies. Twitter is also relatively easy to use, and restricting the text of each post to 280 characters means that the posts have to be succinct; the users then have the option of appending additional information in the form of links, pictures, and videos. Furthermore, the hashtag system allows citizens to quickly access topics of interest to them and participate in discussions.

Saudis are among the world's heaviest Twitter users. This may be due, at least in part, to their feeling that the traditional press and government officials do not genuinely care about the concerns of the general population. Twitter allows its users a degree of freedom of speech that is not available on traditional media, thus acting as a democratic platform where everyone has an equal say (Hebblethwaite, 2014). It should be noted, however, that some interviewees expressed concerns about the 'populist' nature of postings on Twitter, which could call into question the credibility of CJ. They were also worried about the possibility of Twitter being used by foreign enemies to foment

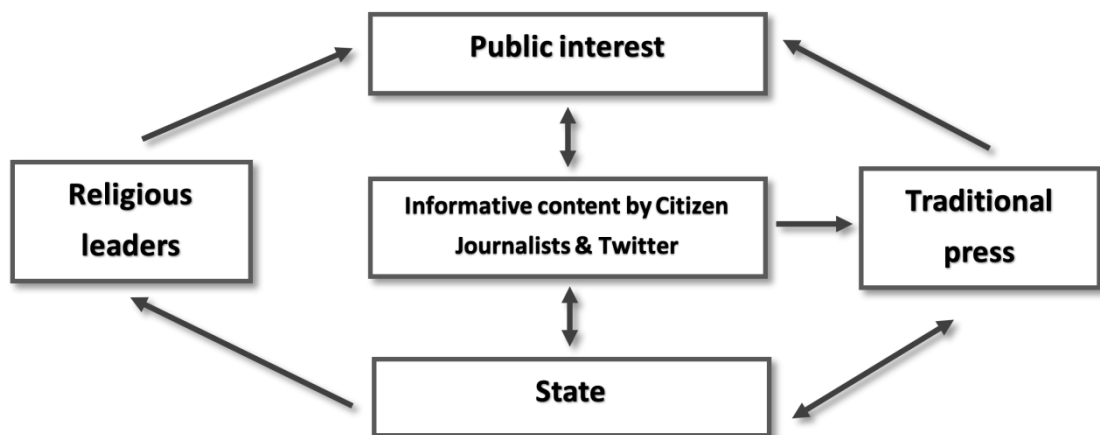
unrest. Some interviewees also provided examples of newspapers making errors in news coverage on their Twitter accounts (see 0).

In relation to the evidence obtained from the interviews and the thematic analysis of Saudi tweets, Objective Three has been achieved.

8.4.4 Objective 4: To Provide an Explanatory Model of Public Interest CJ in the KSA

In the face of limited information about PI in Saudi CJ, this study has created a model of this phenomenon based on the literature review, a thematic analysis of Twitter data, and a series of interviews. The model obtained thusly enables an understanding of PICJ in the KSA that was previously absent from the literature. This model was also used as the basis for the recommendations for developing the practice of PICJ in the KSA (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 0.1: PICJ in the KSA: Model 2



Chapter 7 highlighted that this model is based on **informative content** generated by citizen journalists who specialise in economic matters. These citizen journalists address issues of PI on Twitter, where they can more freely express their views. Twitter also supports CJ by allowing citizen journalists to instantly post tweets, providing up-to-the-minute information and explanations supplemented by links to video, text, infographics, and their own economic articles (see 0). Moreover, the **level of freedom of expression** that Twitter allows facilitates the discussion of issues that are typically not covered in the traditional press, such as government regulation and policy. Further, the

agendas of **religious leaders and** of the **traditional press** limit freedom of expression and motivate citizen journalists to publish on a global platform that enables them to express their opinions and interact with users, rather than to use a state-controlled traditional press that must adhere to government views.

Thus, in the model proposed, the traditional press supports the State and publishes content that shows the idea of PI of the State, rather than that of ordinary citizens. This was explained by PF2, who stressed that the traditional press only represented 'official opinions' (see Section 0). Religious leaders tend to support government decisions, and their tweets often encourage users to make state security and allegiance to the Saudi monarch a priority in the name of Islam, thus persuading their audience that it is in the Saudi PI to do this (see Section 0). In addition, **the interactivity of Twitter** enables citizen journalists to interact with their followers by answering their questions and increasing their awareness about the economic crisis (see 0), unlike traditional Saudi media which use SM only as a one-way communication channel. Thus, objective four has been achieved, and a model of PICJ in the KSA has been created.

This model's significance lies in the fact that it highlights that CJ and the online Twitter interactions between citizen journalists and ordinary Saudi citizens can make a powerful contribution to the way PI is shaped in the KSA. However, the idea that traditional media is able to take over online platforms has also been noted, and indeed it was reflected in the comments by the professional journalists who were interviewed, suggesting that the Saudi Journalism Association should monitor CJ.

The model also implies that PICJ effectively acts as a communication channel between the Saudi State and its citizens, and that by increasing the awareness of the citizens regarding economic issues it has also raised their overall civic awareness. With this has come a desire to abandon deferential attitudes and become more vociferous in demanding information, expressing opinions, and openly criticizing crucial decisions taken by the Saudi government.

8.5 Recommendations for Further Research into Public Interest CJ in the KSA

Recommendations for further research, based on the findings of this study are as follows:

1. Research is needed into how the rights of citizen journalists can be protected and the extent to which platforms such as Twitter can/should be regulated. Interviewees in this study agreed that an independent non-governmental organization should be authorised to monitor content in order to prevent misinformation on issues of PI and an exploration of how this might work would be very useful in future research;
2. Further exploration is needed into how professional journalists bypass the limitations of operating within their press accounts on Twitter. At present these press accounts simply post news, but this study has indicated that professional journalists also operate as citizen journalists. The extent of this practice and how it is regarded by their press organisations merits further investigation;
3. The model developed by this research could be applied to research into PICJ on Twitter focusing on other social, economic or political issues trending in the KSA or the MENA region, such as youth unemployment, women's guardianship or corruption;
4. SM, in particular Twitter content, is a rich field for academic research focused on the Gulf States since, due to political, social and economic changes that took place in 2017, there was concern that 'cyber troops' were manipulating Saudi public opinion through SM. The role of Twitter in Saudi society and how this may influence behaviour during political crises in Gulf States is of great interest. Thus, researchers should pay attention to how Twitter contributes to the creation of an online Saudi identity; and how SM in non-democratic countries, such as the KSA, is used for crisis management, as was done in the 'Qatar crisis' case, for example. Recently Twitter in the KSA has seen evidence of conflict between liberal and conservative groups, which merits further research;

5. It would be interesting to further explore the role of CJ in relation to PI in the KSA. This study has generated evidence that the agenda-setting theory may represent a useful framework for investigating how CJ sets media agendas. In addition, it would be useful to explore how PICJ in non-democratic countries like the KSA functions as a public sphere and to explore this in relation to public sphere theories;
6. This study has shown that CJ on Twitter in the KSA generally has high credibility, though content is also often accidentally and deliberately inaccurate. Citizens' perceptions of the credibility of CJ on Twitter is an area that needs further exploration, as this may change over time and vary according to the issues being addressed. Finally, this research has noted some of the limitations of Twitter and social media and the blogosphere in general;
7. as a source of PICJ in the KSA. Beyond this, however, there is also a need to investigate the other potential negative impacts of Twitter which, like other SM platforms, can be used to radicalize youth, encourage terrorism in Arab countries and disrupt civil society, as well as exploring the role it plays in promoting populism and becoming a means of cyber-bullying or abuse;
8. At present in the KSA CJ is merely classed as 'electronic content' and thus there are no clear guidelines for the practice of CJ, nor any that outline the rights of citizen journalists. Research into how these could be usefully developed would be invaluable.

8.6 Limitations of the Research

- Acquiring historical data from Twitter was one of difficulties that faced the researcher, as the current study deals with hashtags trending in the KSA in the timeframe 2015/2016. All software that imports and analyses Twitter data works only with recent data generated within the last week. To import historical data, the researcher paid per hashtag using sifter software. Moreover, Twitter contains big data, with recent statistics showing that some 500 million tweets are sent per day (Aslam, 2018). Owing to the cost, the researcher had to limit the number of case studies. The inclusion of further hashtags may have added more detail to the

study but careful consideration was given to choosing one which represented serious CJ on economic issues which arguably affected all Saudi citizens.

- Phone interviews were conducted with professional journalists from *Alwatan* located in southern Saudi Arabia, close to the Yemen conflict area. There was a time limit on phone calls, which meant that interviewees could not always be asked additional questions and sometimes need to take another call which interrupted the interview. This meant that these interviews were less detailed than the others.
- Constraints of time meant that the study focused on journalists (professional, columnists and public figures) and did not interview or survey their followers on Twitter. Instead, their voices are represented by the content of their tweets on the selected hashtags, some of which have been quoted in the study.
- Because of the context in which the research was carried out, the study is not representative in terms of gender. The majority of those interviewed were male but the fact that professional journalism remains dominated by men in the KSA greatly restricted the number of females that could be interviewed.

8.7 Concluding Remarks

This thesis demonstrates that Saudi citizen journalists can play a crucial role in raising issues of PI in the context of a non-democratic country like the KSA where the government-controlled official journalism is unable or unwilling to fulfil this function. This study offers an insight into how CJ on Twitter has enabled change in a society where the existence of strong conservative forces meant that the agenda for what was in the PI was previously controlled by the state, religious authorities, and traditional culture. This study also suggests that PICJ can foster social change by drawing these forces of conservatism into an online dialogue on SM with citizen journalists and with citizens in general. Such changes can occur only if PICJ on platforms such as Twitter can survive in the face of online censorship, infiltration by traditional media organisations, or self-censorship resulting from fear of online abuse.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Saudi Media Policy¹⁰⁸

This media policy lays out the goals and principles to which the Saudi media should adhere. This policy is founded on Islam which is the nation's religion and dogma, its aim being to encourage belief in Allah the Almighty among people, to develop the intellectual, cultural and emotional level of citizens and to address social and related issues.

It also aims to instil the idea of obedience to Allah and his Prophet and to the Head of State and to encourage respect for established order and willing compliance with this. It commits those in charge of Saudi media to achieving these goals through education, advice, information, and entertainment.

This policy forms part of general State policy. It consists of the following Articles:

Article 1:

The Saudi media should show their commitment to Islam in everything they produce. They should remain faithful to this nation's religious heritage and should also reject anything that runs counter to that which is ordained by Islam.

Article 2:

The Saudi media should oppose destructive trends and atheistic tendencies, materialistic philosophies and attempts to turn Muslims away from their faith, by exposing these as lies and revealing their dangers to individuals and communities, challenging the conflicting views of other media in accordance with general State policy.

Article 3:

The media should strive to serve the community by instilling its precious Islamic values and preserving the best of its Arab traditions and heritage and opposing everything that might taint or disturb these. This entails strengthening the development of and co-operation with relevant institutions in this area.

Article 4:

¹⁰⁸ Original document is written in Arabic. Translated by the researcher herself.

The media should serve the Kingdom's policy of safeguarding the supreme interests of its own citizens, Arabs in particular and Muslims in general, by embracing this policy and presenting opinions and facts supported with documentary evidence and reliable references.

Article 5:

The media should focus on highlighting the unique character of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for both national and international audience, acknowledging that all the blessings of stability and security that God has bestowed on us and all that has been accomplished and achieved in various fields proceed from our adoption of Islam and Sharia as a constitution for governance. They should also highlight that Allah has granted it custodianship of Islam's holy places and the great deeds it performs in the service of these.

Article 6:

The media should strengthen the ties of love and co-operation among the people of Saudi Arabia by familiarizing citizens with the regions of their home country and presenting their respective outstanding features, and their complementarity and cooperation in the formation of this country.

Article 7:

The media should deepen feelings of loyalty to the Saudi homeland, both as a territory and as a place in citizens' hearts, and should remind them about the powers and abilities that God has bestowed upon them, familiarizing them with its past and present achievements. It should encourage them to give generously and make a vital contribution to its progress, modernization and security, making citizens aware of their primary duty in that regard.

Article 8:

The Saudi media should give all due attention to the family which represents the basic unit in building society. This is where young people receive their earliest knowledge and guidance, where their personalities are formed and where they are taught how to behave. The media should constantly offer families everything they need to help them achieve this mission and maintain these close bonds.

Article 9:

The Saudi media should acknowledge that children are pure and imaginative in character and that the image of tomorrow's society is to be glimpsed in the child of today. This being the case, programs designed to guide, educate and entertain children should receive all due care and attention. They should be evaluated on studied education basis and entrusted to those with the necessary expertise in this field.

Article 10:

In recognition of the fact that females complement males, the media should pay close attention to women's nature, and the role that God has bestowed on her.

The media should focus on programs that help women to perform those functions that are appropriate to their role in society.

Article 11:

The Saudi media should devote special attention to young people, ever mindful of the hazardous journey that they must pass through from adolescence to adulthood. They should be offered carefully designed programs that address their problems and meet their needs; that protect them from all kinds of deviant behaviour and provide them with a solid and wholesome grounding in religion, morals and conduct.

Article 12:

The Saudi media should demonstrate its concern for media documentation, using different audio and video means to capture everything related to the history and culture of the Kingdom. It should archive documentary and news materials and acquire both home-produced and foreign materials relating to the Kingdom and its media heritage.

Article 13:

The Saudi media should collaborate with educational and social institutions and specialist research centers that engage in the study of media.

Article 14:

The media should produce high-level, complex cultural programs for highly educated groups that will meet the needs of the cultural intelligentsia and facilitate their contact with scientific developments and improve their standing by their renewed intellectual efforts.

Article 15:

The Saudi media should aim to increase the level of informative material in all fields and encourage experts to contribute to their specialization. It should exclude material that is not of a sufficiently high level or produced by those who lack the necessary qualifications in religious or academic knowledge, understanding or integrity, thus creating the conditions that will enable them to fulfil their role.

Article 16:

The Saudi media should work to combat and eradicate illiteracy, being aware of the important responsibility which they have in this area. They should dedicate an appropriate part of their efforts to addressing this issue on a scientific and educational basis, providing cultural programs that cater for different tastes and ages and improve people's wisdom and understanding.

Article 17:

Mindful of the fact that that standard Arabic is the conduit for Islam and its cultural heritage, the Saudi media should make every effort to conform to the following:

1. Instruct writers and program developers to obey the rules of grammatically accurate standard Arabic and to ensure that this language is expressed correctly and accurately.
2. Instruct broadcasters, program presenters, seminar directors and others to use standard Arabic and to guard against committing errors in pronunciation, grammar or orthography and to comply with the correct rules governing this Arab asset.
3. Ensure that all material provided by the media is edited for anything that might lower the standards of Arabic, devalue it or diminish its importance.
4. In the case of popular programs, which are presented in the colloquial dialect, gradually improve the language and replace the vernacular with a simplified standard dialect.
5. Promote programs that encourage standard Arabic use by the audience, representing its beauty to the audience and supporting plays and serials that use this form of the language.
6. Contribute to the teaching of standard Arabic to non-native speakers in the Islamic world using the latest scientific and educational methods.

Article 18:

The Saudi media should play a role in supporting the scientific and cultural renaissance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by the following means:

1. Encouraging researchers, scholars and thinkers by all possible means, including contributing to the dissemination of their work and showcasing their activities.
2. Nurturing and sustaining young talent, encouraging them with resources and support to help them to reach their goals.
3. Organising academic forums, scientific and literary conferences and symposia amongst the Kingdom's intellectuals, and also between them and their foreign counterparts in order to foster high-level academic life, open the doors to constructive dialogue and highlighting the cultural and scientific aspects of the Kingdom both at home and abroad.
4. Encouraging specialized journals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular, and in the Arab and Islamic world in general, in consistent with the media policy.

5. Promoting national publishers and offering material support and encouragement to help them carry out their duty to publish important Saudi works; providing incentives which will ensure widespread distributed throughout the kingdom and abroad; encouraging the establishment of book fairs to showcase the scientific and cultural progress of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the significant achievements that it has accomplished in science and thought.

Article 19:

Saudi media should emphasize the importance of heritage and the urgent need to revive this. It should therefore be committed to enhancing its contribution in this area by various means, in particular by the following:

1. Promoting the dissemination of Saudi's material and spiritual heritage by various means, the most important being:
 - a. Development of programs based on the most important sources for Saudi's heritage, and showcasing Saudi's heritage sites;
 - b. Support for researchers either by printing their work at state expense, or purchasing appropriate copies of printed works.
 - c. Facilitating the means of access to heritage books for those who need them.
2. Opposing all attempts intended to destroy or minimize this legacy.
3. Encouraging programs based on heritage publications, especially in the field of literary works, plays and biographies;
4. Presenting masterpieces of our heritage that inform people about the efforts of our predecessors in various fields of knowledge, celebrating their remarkable achievements and urging them to link present with its past

Article 20:

The media should strengthen the bonds of brotherhood, cooperation and solidarity among Muslims who share fellow feelings as Islamic peoples and countries, emphasizing their material and spiritual potential and bolstering their cooperation and collaboration.

Article 21:

The Saudi media should:

- a) a call for solidarity and cooperation among all Arabs, uniting them as it should be and preventing disharmony.
- b) b defend their concerns and address their key problems whether these are social, political or economic and remind

them of their duty to champion and defend Islam since God has bestowed this honour on them.

Article 22:

The Saudi media should acknowledge that Allah's invitation to Muslims and others is ever-lasting and will endure until God inherits the Earth and those upon it. Therefore, they should collaborate in performing this solemn duty by proselytizing in a wise manner, rejecting everything that might provoke other people's anger.

Article 23:

Saudi media organizations should work with their counterparts in the Islamic world, in general, with Arab media especially, to present a united media ideology that serves the spiritual and material needs of Muslims, recognizes their common worldview and culture, and reflects their feelings.

Article 24:

The Saudi media should emphasize respect for the rights of individuals and of communities while simultaneously working to instill the spirit of social solidarity among the nation's people, helping to create cooperation and self-reliance and informing citizens about their civic duties as an individual.

Article 25:

The Saudi media should present facts objectively to the public and avoid exaggerated amounts, acknowledging the need for truth in what they say and their obligation to avoid anything that might cause resentment or stir up conflict and ill will.

Article 26:

Freedom of expression in the Saudi media is guaranteed within the framework of Islamic and national objectives and values.

Article 27:

In its foreign policy, the Saudi media should adopt a humane attitude respecting the individual's right to live in freedom on his own land and should denounce assaults of any kind against the rights of nations and individuals. It should combat expansionist ambitions, champion the right to justice and peace and stand up against racial injustice and discrimination.

Article 28:

This media policy emphasizes the importance of developing educated human expertise capable of achieving the objectives of the Saudi media and ensuring these efforts are maintained by ongoing training and assessment.

Article 29:

The Saudi media should encourage the production of quality local news in accordance with the media policy.

Article 30:

All media organizations in Saudi Arabia should be committed to this policy and to all regulations and regulations issued to be implemented.

Appendix 2: The Press Establishments Law PEL Saudi Arabia¹⁰⁹

Article 1:

Definitions: The following terms, wherever mentioned, shall have the meanings following them unless the context requires otherwise: 1 License: The official approval that permits the formation of a press establishment. 2 Full time commitment: Not being engaged in any governmental or non-governmental job for a wage in other than the establishment. 3 Establishment or establishments: The press establishment or press establishments. 4 Member of an establishment: The person who owns part of the capital of the establishment. 5 The paper: The newspaper or magazine. 6 Publications: Newspapers and other published materials of the press establishment. 7 The Ministry: The Ministry of Information. 8 The Minister: The Minister of Information.

Part One Formation of the Establishment

Article 2:

a This Law stems from the media policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and achieves its goals. b An establishment is a private entity that aims to publish periodicals to serve society by disseminating culture and knowledge, committed to truth and objectivity in all its publications. It may make reasonable profits in a way consistent with its object, within the provisions of this Law. c An establishment shall be formed pursuant to the provisions of this Law and shall have a distinctive name.

Article 3:

a The Minister shall issue the License to form an establishment upon the approval of the President of the Council of Ministers based on an application submitted by a number of Saudis, not less than thirty, stating the goals of the establishment, names of founders, their qualifications, professions and ages, the name of the establishment, the publications to be issued by it, the language or languages of its publications, its capital, head office and other data specified by the Ministry. b An establishment may be permitted, by a decision of the Minister, to issue additional periodicals.

Article 4:

The head office of the establishment shall be in the city specified in the license, and some of its publications may be issued in places other than the head office upon the approval of the Ministry.

¹⁰⁹ Translation from Alzahrani (2016).

Article 5:

a The capital of the establishment shall be a sum sufficient to achieve its goals. b The establishment shall have a corporate personality and an independent financial responsibility, and the financial liability of the members shall be limited to their respective shares in the capital of the establishment. c Each establishment shall publish its closing accounts and annual budget, certified by a licensed auditor. d A sufficient percentage of the annual profits shall be set aside for the purposes of training and the procurement of modern technological means necessary for improving journalistic work. e A statutory reserve of not less than 10% of the annual profits shall be set aside. The general assembly may decide to discontinue allocating to such reserve when it reaches half of the capital.

Part Two Members of an Establishment

Article 6:

A member of an establishment shall meet the following conditions: a Be a Saudi national. b Not be a member of another press establishment. c Be a holder of a university degree at a minimum, a man of learning, intellect and the media or a businessman with interest in culture. Membership of corporate persons of intellectual, cultural and scientific nature may be accepted.

Article 7:

a Members of an establishment shall enjoy equal voting and candidacy rights to the board of directors. b New members may join the establishment through increasing its capital or if a member sells his shares or part thereof or assigns his shares or part thereof or by inheritance. c In case of inheritance, the heirs shall nominate just one of them. If the nominated heir does not meet membership requirements the shares may be sold to one or more of the members of the establishment or to persons from outside.

Part Three The General Assembly and the Board of Directors

Article 8:

The General Assembly shall be comprised of all the members of the establishment, and it shall be the highest authority. It may take the necessary resolutions to realize the purposes for which the establishment was formed, particularly the following: a Formulating the general policy of the establishment. b Selecting and appointing members of the board of directors. c Approving the appointment and dismissal of the general manager and the editor-in-chief. d Approving the budget and closing accounts of the establishment. e Appointing a certified auditor. f Issuing the internal regulations of the establishment as well as the other regulations that regulate the conduct of its business.

Article 9:

General assembly meetings shall convene in accordance with the following rules and procedures: a The general assembly shall meet once annually upon invitation by the chairman of the board of directors. This invitation may also be made, when necessary, by the chairman of the board of directors, at the request of three members of the board of directors, or at the request of at least a quarter of the members. b The chairman of the board of directors shall preside over the meetings of the general assembly. c The general assembly shall convene with the attendance of the majority of members. If there is no quorum in the first meeting, the second meeting shall be deemed valid if attended by one third of members, personally or by proxy. The Ministry may assign a representative to attend the meeting. d Voting in the general assembly shall be on the basis of membership, and every member may vote on his own behalf or on behalf of another member by proxy. The resolutions of the general assembly shall be adopted by absolute majority of the members attending the meeting in person or by proxy. In case of a tie, the chairman shall have the casting vote. e Minutes shall be written for every meeting of the general assembly recording the names of members attending in person and those represented by proxy, in addition to the agenda and resolutions adopted, as well as an adequate summary of the deliberations that take place during the meeting. These minutes shall be recorded regularly after every meeting in a special register signed by the chairman of the assembly and the secretary of the meeting. Copies shall be distributed to the members of the general assembly.

Article 10:

Board of Directors: Each establishment shall have a board of directors to be comprised of: 1 A number of members of the establishment, not fewer than six. 2 The general manager and the editors-in-chief of the establishment provided that their number shall not exceed one third of the total number of the members of the board of directors. 3 The members of the board shall elect, by absolute majority, from amongst themselves in their first meeting a chairman for the board, provided that he is not the general manager or the editor-in-chief.

Article 11:

Subject to the powers given to the general assembly, the board of directors may adopt the resolutions and take necessary measures to achieve the objects of the establishment, particularly the following: a Proposing the internal and other regulations that regulate the conduct of business. b Approving the necessary plans to increase the resources of the establishment. c Approving the draft budget and closing account of the establishment before presentation to the general assembly. d Proposing new publications and applying to the Ministry for approval. e Nominating the general manager and the editor-in-chief for each paper and obtaining the

approval of the Minister for the nomination and dismissal of the editor-in-chief.

Article 12:

a The board of directors shall meet by invitation from its chairman at least once every three months. b A meeting of the board shall not be valid unless attended by at least half of its members, including the chairman or whoever he deputizes. c Resolutions of the board shall be adopted by absolute majority vote of members present. In the case of a tie, the chairman shall have the casting vote. d Minutes shall be written for each meeting, recording the place and date of the meeting, the names of the members present and absent, the reason of absence, if any, the agenda, topics discussed and the resolutions adopted. The minutes shall be signed by the chairman of the board, the secretary and the members present. e The chairman of the board may – in case of his absence – deputize a member of the board to represent him for a specified period.

Article 13:

Membership of the board shall expire in the following cases: a The expiration of the board term as specified in the internal regulations of the establishment. b Resignation or physical disability. c Removal of the member from the board pursuant to a resolution by the general assembly. d If the member appointed to the board by virtue of his position in the establishment loses his post. e If the member is convicted of a crime impinging upon his religion, honor or honesty.

Article 14:

If the post of a member of the board other than the ex officio members in the establishment becomes vacant, the board may appoint a replacement, provided that this is presented to the general assembly in its following meeting. The new member shall continue the term of his predecessor on the board.

Part Four Management and Editing

Article 15:

Every establishment shall have a general manager to run its financial and administrative affairs, in accordance with the governing policies and instructions, and represent it in its relations with other bodies regarding financial and administrative matters. The internal regulations of the establishment shall specify his authorities and powers.

Article 16:

The general manager shall satisfy the following conditions: a Be a Saudi national. b Work on a full time basis. c Hold a university degree, with experience of not less than five years in administrative or journalistic work. A

person with a distinguished intellectual and administrative ability may be exempted from the requirement of the university degree.

Article 17:

If the post of the general manager becomes vacant, his deputy shall assume responsibilities. If there is no deputy, the board of directors shall choose one of its members to perform the duties for a period not exceeding three months. In both cases, a general manager shall be chosen during the said period to be appointed temporarily until the matter is presented to the general assembly in its following meeting for approval.

Article 18:

Every paper shall have an editor-in-chief to be responsible for what is published therein. He shall have the following tasks and powers: a Directly supervising, managing and directing all editorial affairs of the paper in order to achieve the goals and objects of the establishment. b Representing the paper in its relations with others regarding journalistic affairs. c Preparing plans and programs for the development of the paper. d Exercising the authorities given to him by internal regulations which enable him to carry out his duty in a suitable and competitive manner.

Article 19:

The editor-in-chief shall satisfy the following conditions: a Be a Saudi national. b Work on a full time basis. c Hold a university degree with adequate intellectual and journalistic abilities.

Article 20:

Service of the general manager and the editor-in-chief shall terminate in one of the following cases: a Acceptance of resignation or physical disability. b If a reasoned recommendation by two thirds of the members of the board of directors is issued to relieve any one of them of his post and the same is approved by the general assembly.

Article 21:

If the post of editor-in-chief becomes vacant, the board of directors shall assign one of the employees of the establishment to perform the tasks of editor-in-chief. The board of directors shall take the legal measures to appoint an editor-in-chief within a period not exceeding three months from the date of such vacancy.

Article 22:

The paper shall have full-time editors appointed by the editor-in-chief. Their tasks shall include: a Working to achieve the goals and objects of the establishment. b Working to achieve the excellence required for the paper. c Properly representing the paper in functions, meetings and conferences. d Observing the provisions of the Copyright Law.

Article 23:

Service of an editor shall terminate in the following cases: a) Acceptance of resignation or physical disability; b) If a reasoned recommendation is issued by the editor-in-chief and the same is approved by the board of directors.

Part Five Dissolution and Liquidation of an Establishment

Article 24:

An establishment shall be dissolved and the license for its formation revoked in the following cases: a) If the losses of an establishment amount to fifty percent of the capital unless the general assembly decides the continuation of the establishment with the approval of the Ministry. b) If the general assembly decides to dissolve it by a majority of two thirds of the members.

Article 25:

In the event that an establishment is dissolved, the following measures shall be taken: a) The general assembly shall determine the manner of liquidation and shall appoint a liquidator whereupon the functions of the board of directors and the general manager shall terminate. b) The activities of the establishment shall end except as necessary to carry out the liquidation process. c) The liquidation process shall be carried out under the supervision and responsibility of the liquidator in his capacity as a representative of the owners, monitored by the Ministry. d) The Ministry shall call for a meeting of the general assembly to approve the results of the liquidation.

Part Six General Provisions

Article 26:

An establishment shall, within one year from the beginning of its activity, prepare the following:

a) An organizational chart indicating departments, sections and units of the establishment and showing their tasks and administrative relations; b) Work regulations stating the duties and rights of the employees of the establishment; c) Rewards and penalties regulations; d) Pay scale assuring the employees of the establishment of their rights to promotion and annual increments; e) Regulations for assignment of allowances, compensation and the like; f) Internal regulations which determine the functions of the establishment's departments and powers of its officers. They also regulate relationships among them, in addition to other relevant organizational matters.

Article 27:

An association of Saudi journalists of an independent corporate personality concerned with journalists' affairs shall be established in accordance with the provisions of this Law. The implementing regulations shall specify its tasks and powers.

Article 28:

Existing establishments shall, within one year from the date of this Law's coming into effect, adjust their affairs to conform to its provisions.

Article 29:

The Minister shall issue the implementing regulations necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this Law within one year from the date of its promulgation.

Article 30:

This Law shall supersede the Private Press Establishments' Law issued by Royal Decree No 62 dated 24/8/1383 H and shall become effective thirty days after the date of publication in the Official Gazette.

Appendix 3: Printed Materials and Publication Law PMPL Saudi Arabia¹¹⁰

Article 1:

Definitions: The following terms, wherever mentioned in this Law, shall have the meanings attached to them.

1. Circulation: Putting the printed material at the disposal of a number of people through free distribution or presenting it for sale, fixing it to walls or displaying it on store facades or billboards or road signs and so forth.
2. Press: The profession of editing journalistic printed materials or their publication.
3. Journalist: Anyone practicing journalistic editing as a profession, either on full-time or part-time basis.
4. Newspaper: Any printed material with a fixed title, published periodically or on regular or irregular occasions, such as newspapers, magazines and brochures.
5. Printer: Anyone in charge of the printing press, whether the owner or his representative.
6. Printing Press: Any establishment designed to print words, sounds, drawings or pictures for the purpose of circulation.
7. Printed Material: Any means of expression printed for circulation, whether a word, drawing, picture or sound.
8. Bookstore: A place prepared for the display of books, newspapers or the like for the purpose of sale or rent.
9. Distributor: The mediator- an individual or a company- between the author or the publisher, the distribution centers and the beneficiary.
10. Author: Anyone who prepares academic, cultural or artistic material for the purpose of circulation.
11. Publisher: Anyone in charge of issuing any academic, cultural or artistic production for the purpose of circulation.
12. Ministry: The Ministry of Information
13. Minister: The Minister of Information

Article 2:

The following activities shall be subject to the provisions of this Law: 1 Printed materials. 2 Preparation services before printing. 3 Printing press. 4 Bookstores. 5 Drawing and calligraphy. 6 Photography. 7 Import, sale or rent of films and video tapes. 8 Sound recordings and records. 9 Radio, television, movie or theatrical artistic production. 10 Television and radio

¹¹⁰ Translation is from Awad (2010) p.332 onwards.

studios. 11 Foreign media offices and their correspondents. 12 Publicity and advertisement. 13 Public relations. 14 Publication. 15 Distribution. 16 Press services. 17 Production, sale or rent of computer programs. 18 Information studies and consultations. 19 Copying and duplication. 20 Any activity suggested for addition by the Ministry and approved by the President of the Council of Ministers.

Article 3:

Among the prints and press purposes the call for the true religion and the venerable, the directive to the uprightness and good and the diffusion of culture and knowledge.

Article 4:

1 It is not permitted to exercise any activity mentioned in Article Two, except by permission of the Ministry, and this shall not exempt from obtaining any other license required by other laws.

2 The Implementing Regulations shall determine the duration of the license for each activity and specify the appropriate grace period for renewal of the license prior to its expiry after ensuring the licensee's practice of the profession.

Article 5:

1 With due consideration to the requirements of laws and agreements, the licensee shall satisfy the following: a Be a Saudi national. b Be not less than Twenty-five years old. The Minister at his discretion may waive the age requirement. c Be well-known for good conduct and behavior with regard to undertaking this activity. d Have an appropriate qualification as specified by the Implementing Regulations. 2 In the case of companies, the previous conditions shall apply to their representatives. 3 The Implementing Regulations shall specify the conditions necessary for the work of foreign media offices and their correspondents.

Article 6:

Government bodies, educational and research institutions, academic associations, literary and cultural clubs and private press establishments may publish non-periodical printed materials in the field of their specialization and under their responsibility.

Article 7:

The fee of the license or its renewal for the headquarters or the branch shall be determined according to the following: 1 Two thousand riyals 2000 for any of the following activities: a Printing press. b Preparation services before printing. c Publication. d Distribution. e Radio, television, or movie artistic production. f Television and radio studios. g Information studies and consultations. h Press services. i Publicity and advertisement. j Public

relations. k Import, sale or rent of films and video tapes. l Production, sale, or rent of computer programs. 2 One thousand riyals 1000 for any of the following activities: a Bookstores. b Sound_recordings and records. c Drawing and calligraphy. d Photography. e Copying and duplication.

Article 8:

Freedom of expression is guaranteed through all means of publication within the provisions of Shari'ah and the law.

Article 9:

For approval, the printed material shall observe the following: 1 Not be in violation of the provisions of Shari'ah. 2 Not lead to jeopardizing the country's security or its public order or serve foreign interests in conflict with national interest. 3 Not lead to inciting feuds and spreading dissension among citizens. 4 Not lead to encroachment on people's dignity and freedom or to their extortion or defaming them or their trade names. 5 Not lead to encouraging crime or its incitement. 6 Not be detrimental to the country's economic or health status. 7 Not disclose facts of investigations or trials, unless permitted by the competent authority. 8 Be committed to objective and constructive criticism leading to public good, based upon true facts and evidence.

Article 10:

All printed materials within the Kingdom shall have the necessary bibliographical data, as specified by the Implementing Regulations.

Article 11:

The license may be assigned, rented or shared with others after approval of the Ministry, pursuant to the provisions of this Law.

Article 12:

If the licensee dies, the heirs shall notify the Ministry within two months of the date of death. They have the right to continue the activity after the Ministry's approval, pursuant to the provisions of this Law.

Domestic Printed Materials

Article 13:

Any author, publisher, printer or distributor desiring to print or distribute any printed material shall provide the Ministry with two copies for approval before printing or circulation. The Ministry shall approve the printed material or reject it, giving the reasons for rejection within thirty days. The party concerned may file a grievance with the Minister against the rejection decision.

Article 14:

Every printing press shall keep a record of all materials printed therein. The record shall be declared to the authorized personnel upon request, and the Ministry may, through the Implementing Regulations, exempt any printed material from the record requirement.

Article 15:

The author, publisher and printer are responsible for any violation in the printed material if printed or set for circulation without approval, and if it is not possible to identify either of them, the distributor shall be held responsible. Otherwise, the responsibility shall fall upon the seller.

Article 16:

The Ministry shall demand the author or the publisher, according to the deposit system, to submit the copies required for deposit of whatever is printed inside the Kingdom.

Article 17:

Advertisement and publicity materials shall not be added to films, tapes or the like on which artistic or sports materials are recorded and for which contracts are concluded for their use in the Kingdom, except through local advertisement and publicity establishments or companies and after approval by the Ministry. The Implementing Regulations shall determine the duration period of advertisements in every work.

Foreign Printed Materials

Article 18:

Foreign printed materials shall be approved if they are free of anything offensive to Islam or the system of government, detrimental to the high interest of the State, or in violation of public decency and morals.

Article 19:

Foreign printed materials shall be approved or rejected with a statement of reasons thereof within thirty days from the date of receiving the application. Papers shall be treated according to the Implementing Regulations.

Article 20:

Every Saudi who publishes non-periodical printed material outside the Kingdom and submits an application to the Ministry for approval shall attach to his application proof of deposit of the required copies, in accordance with the deposit system.

Article 21:

The Ministry's censorship shall not apply to printed materials imported by government bodies, educational and research institutions, academic associations, cultural and literary clubs and private press establishments for their own use.

Article 22:

The Implementing Regulations – within the provisions of this Law - shall regulate importation and distribution of foreign printed materials. They shall also specify the procedures necessary to facilitate bringing in and subscribing to books and other printed materials by researchers and scholars for their academic purposes and for their personal possession.

Article 23:

Upon approval by the President of the Council of Ministers, foreign papers may be printed in the Kingdom as specified by the Implementing Regulations and in accordance with the provisions of this Law.

Local Press

Article 24:

Local papers shall not be subject to censorship, except under extraordinary circumstances as determined by the President of the Council of Ministers.

Article 25:

1 Outside the domain of private press establishments, private bodies or individuals may publish papers by license from the Ministry and upon approval of the President of the Council of Ministers.

2 The Ministry's approval shall be sufficient for publishing the following: a Brochures of limited circulation published by private bodies and not intended for sale, provided that they be limited to serving the activities of the publishing body. b Specialized academic and professional journals, published by private bodies or individuals. 3 papers and academic journals published by public educational institutions and government bodies, after informing the Ministry. 4 The Supervisor of any printed material mentioned in this Article and the director of the agency publishing it are responsible for what is published therein, according to the provisions of this Law.

Article 26:

The name of the licensee, name of the editor-in-chief, issue number, place of publication, date, price, and name of the printing press shall be placed in a prominent position in the paper.

Article 27:

1 The name of any paper which was published and then discontinued may not be used except after the lapse of ten years from the date of its discontinuation, unless the persons concerned relinquish the name before the expiry of that period. 2 It is not allowed to give a name to a paper that may cause confusion with the name of another paper.

Article 28:

The Implementing Regulations shall specify the rules regulating the annual subscription to papers, the price of a copy as well as the advertisement affairs.

Article 29:

The Ministry may withdraw the license or cancel the approval to publish a paper in one of the following two cases: 1 If not published within a maximum period of two years from the licensing notification. 2 If publication is discontinued for an unbroken period exceeding one year.

Article 30:

It is prohibited for papers and their staff to accept any benefit such as donations, subsidies or the like from domestic or foreign parties, except with the approval of the Ministry.

Article 31:

Publication of a paper shall not be banned except under extraordinary circumstances and with the approval of the President of the Council of Ministers.

Article 32:

a Editorial advertisements for establishments and individuals may be published, provided that it is indicated that they are advertisement material.
b Editorial advertisements for countries may be published with the approval of the Ministry, provided that it is indicated that they are advertisements.

Article 33:

1 The editor-in-chief of the paper or whoever acts on his behalf in his absence, shall be responsible for whatever is published therein. 2 Without prejudice to the responsibility of the editor-in-chief or whoever acts on his behalf, the writer shall be responsible for the content of the text.

Article 34:

Um-Al-Qura newspaper is the official gazette of the state.

Penalties

Article 35:

Any paper that attributes to someone an incorrect statement or publishes incorrect news, shall rectify that by publishing the correction free of charge, upon the request of the party concerned, in the first issue after the request for correction, and it shall be in the same place where the news or statement was published or in a prominent position in the paper. Those harmed shall have the right to claim compensation.

Article 36:

The Ministry, when necessary, may withdraw any issue of a paper without compensation, if it includes any violation of the provisions of Shari'ah, pursuant to a decision by the committee provided for in Article Thirty-Seven.

Article 37:

Violations of the provisions of this Law shall be reviewed by a committee formed pursuant to a decision by the Minister. It shall be chaired by the competent Deputy Minister and its members shall not be less than three, of whom one shall be a legal counselor. Its decisions shall be issued by majority after summoning the violator or his representative and hearing his statements. It may summon whomever it desires to hear his statement. It may also seek help from whomever it may deem necessary. The Committee's decisions shall not be considered valid except after the approval of the Minister.

Article 38:

Without prejudice to any other harsher punishment provided for by another law, anyone who violates any of the provisions of this Law shall be punished by a fine not exceeding fifty thousand riyals, the closure of his place of business or establishment for a period not exceeding two months, or by permanent closure of his place of business or establishment. A decision as to the punishment shall be issued by the Minister pursuant to a proposal by the committee provided for in Article Thirty-Seven of this Law.

Article 39:

The Ministry may withdraw domestic or foreign printed materials displayed for circulation in the following two cases: 1 If they are banned from circulation. 2 If they are not licensed and contain some of the banned materials specified in Article Nine or Article Eighteen. The body authorized to review these matters is the Committee provided for in Article Thirty-Seven. The Committee shall decide what it deems appropriate either by destroying the printed materials without compensation or requiring the person concerned to send them back outside the Kingdom at his own expense, if they are foreign materials.

Article 40:

Anyone against whom a punishment is rendered, pursuant to the provisions of this Law, may file a grievance before the Board of Grievances, within sixty days from the date of notification of the decision issued in this regard.

Article 41:

If the Ministry licenses a printed material and something unexpectedly occurs requiring its withdrawal, it shall compensate the party concerned for the cost of the copies withdrawn.

General Provisions

Article 42:

For the approval of academic and intellectual works, the Ministry shall assign those who are qualified, competent, specialized and acquainted with the laws and publication instructions. It may, as it deems appropriate, seek help from part-timers, outside the Ministry.

Article 43:

In coordination with the bodies concerned, the Ministry shall set the regulating rules for holding book exhibitions by private publication and distribution houses, and supervising them.

Article 44:

Pursuant to a decision by the Minister, associations for the activities provided for in Article Two may be established in order to deal with their issues and coordinate their tasks. Every association shall set regulations to be approved by the Minister, clarifying its objectives and regulating its work.

Article 45:

The Ministry shall be the body authorized to follow up the implementation of this Law and to hold accountable those violating it, pursuant to its provisions.

Article 46:

The Minister shall issue the Implementing Regulations of this Law within a maximum period of eighteen months from of the date of its publication, and they shall be published in the Official Gazette.

Article 47:

Any party engaged in any of the activities governed by this Law shall adjust his status, pursuant to the provisions provided, within a period of two years from the date of its implementation.

Article 48:

This Law shall supersede the Law of Printed Materials and Publication issued by Royal Decree No M/17 dated 13/04/1402 H and shall nullify provisions that contradict it.

Article 49:

This Law shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall be effective after ninety days from the date of its publication.

Appendix 4: Summary of Executive Regulations for Electronic Publication¹¹¹

Saudi Arabia has recently announced new executive regulations for web publication the “Regulations” which will come into force one month after publication in the Official Gazette. The Regulations apply to owners whether Saudi nationals or residents of Saudi Arabia of web publications operating from Saudi Arabia and foreign websites that are hosted in Saudi Arabia.

The Regulations regulate 13 types of web publications which are as follows:

1. Electronic newspapers;
2. Media websites TV, radio, newspapers, magazines... etc;
3. Electronic advertising;
4. Websites for displaying audio visual materials;
5. Broadcasts via mobile phone;
6. Broadcasts via other means;
7. Internet forums
8. Blogs;
9. Personal Websites;
10. Mailing groups;
11. Electronic archive;
12. Chat rooms; and
13. Any form of web publishing that the Ministry of Information and Culture decides to add from time to time.

Types 1-6 are subject to license and types 7-12 along with type 13, are subject to registration with the Ministry of Information and Culture. An applicant for a license must: a be a Saudi; b be no less than 20 years of age; c have a high school certificate; d hold an appropriate license for the same activity; e be of good character and conduct; f have a personal mail address; g specify an email address; h employ editors-in-chief who have been approved by the Ministry of Information and Culture; i have a domain name. An applicant for registration must: a be a Saudi or resident of Saudi Arabia; b be of good character and conduct; c have a personal mail address; d specify an email address; e have an operational website.

The Regulations specify who is liable for the content published on the web. For example, the editor-in-chief or his deputy and the author are responsible for the content. Furthermore, the licensee must specify who is responsible for content, otherwise he will be liable. The owner of a personal website is responsible for the content.

A person found to be acting in violation of the Regulations is subject to one of the following penalties:

- Obligatory publishing of corrections;
- Fines;
- Compensation for infringement against private rights;

¹¹¹ Original in Arabic. Translation from Deeb (2011).

- Partial blocking;
- Temporary blocking for more than two months; or
- Total blocking.

The Regulations provide a grace period of six months from publication in the Official Gazette for owners to register and obtain a license.

Appendix 5: Membership of the Saudi Journalists Association¹¹²

Eligibility Criteria for Membership of the Association:

- 1- The journalist must be at least 20 years old and must have a minimum educational level of Secondary School Certificate.
- 2- The journalist must have practised full-time journalism continuously for at least one year.
- 3- The journalist must be practising journalism in a local press institution or must be authorized to work as a reporter or journalist for a foreign media outlet.
- 4- The journalist must practise one or more of the following activities:
Written journalism, reporting, translation of written press, photography, editing, commentating, drawing or producing.
- 5- The journalist must not have been convicted of any crime that impinges upon his honor or honesty.
- 6- The journalist must provide the documents required by the Association.

Membership of the Journalists Association:

Membership is not restricted to journalists working for newspapers but also includes all those working in the press. Article 20 of the Journalists Act determined the journalist profession as follows:

- a- A journalist is someone who practises the profession of written, audio or visual journalism in a press building related to journalism.
- b- All those who contribute to journalism work and help to prepare and design news and press materials to be published, such as producers, writers, correspondents, translators, investigators, photographers, designers, editors, commentators, artists, calligraphers and directors. These include:
 - 1- Those working in press institutions.
 - 2- Those working in institutions that issue newspapers and magazines but are not press institutions.
 - 3- Those working in journalism posts for governmental, educational and cultural bodies that issue periodical publications.
 - 4- Those working in press service offices in areas relating to work as a reporter or publishing news in newspapers and magazines and

¹¹² Original was in Arabic. Translation is by the researcher herself.

in corresponding with local and foreign media outlets pursuant to the regulations of the Law of Printed Materials and Publication.

- 5- Those working in radio and television news departments and who practise activities related to journalism.
- 6- Those working in the Saudi Press Agency in any of the aforementioned activities.
- 7- Full-time Saudi correspondents and bureau chiefs authorized to report for Saudi and non-Saudi media outlets inside and outside the Kingdom.

Objectives of Establishing the Journalists Association:

The objectives include developing mechanisms for improving the performance of journalist members and developing the level of the journalism profession. The association was established to serve the professional objectives of journalists in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Also, the decision of the Council of Ministers stressed that the association is responsible for applying professional standards among journalists, as well as, organizing and supervising their professional performance. Association, 2004

Types of Membership:¹¹³

Journalists' membership of the association is based on scope of their journalism activity. Membership types are as follows:

1. Full-time Member:

- a. Any Saudi journalist working in this profession full-time.
- b. Any Saudi journalist working full-time and authorized to work as a correspondent or bureau chief for any local or international media outlet based on a written agreement and in return for a fixed salary. He must not be working in any other profession.
- c. All conditions related to this profession and press production techniques, especially news production must be met by the media outlet in which he works.

2. Part-time Member:

- a. Any Saudi journalist practising journalism on a part-time basis.
- b. Saudi journalists working in governmental or non-governmental jobs who are also practising journalism.

3. Associate Member:

¹¹³ In 2016 changes to the legislation meant that to obtain SJA membership, Saudi journalists had to work full time in the local press.

Any non-Saudi journalist living in the Kingdom and working in journalism based on a work contract.

Membership fees for each type are decided by the General Assembly.

If any member provides false information in the aim of improving his membership type and it is proven that some conditions do not apply to him shall be referred by the Board of Directors to a disciplinary committee. This committee shall look into his case and recommend any penalties it sees appropriate such as a warning or fine. Should the violation be repeated, the committee shall have the right to freeze his membership for a determined period of time or to terminate it. The committee's recommendations are raised to the Board of Directors for ratification.

Cancellation, Freezing and Dropping of a membership:

1. The Board of Directors shall cancel a membership in any of the following cases:
 - a. Resignation: by a letter presented to the head of the Association or by expressing so in a media outlet.
 - b. Demise.
 - c. If the journalist starts working in a non-press institution and no longer works in journalism.
 - d. If the journalist fails to pay membership fees for a period exceeding six months.
2. The Board shall freeze membership in any of the following cases:
 - a. If the journalist ceases his journalism activities for at least a year with no accepted justification.
 - b. If the member fails to pay the required fees for a period exceeding three months.
 - c. If the journalist starts working in another field without notifying the Board of Directors.
3. Membership is dropped pursuant to a decision made by the General Assembly based on the recommendation of the Board of Directors following investigations carried out if the member acts in a way that contradicts the association's objectives.

The association may cease to provide its services to any member who fails to pay his financial commitments from the day the membership is terminated.

Appendix 6: Pilot Study Participants

POSITION	ORGANIZATION
PhD student, Communications and Media	Indian University of Pennsylvania
Assistant Professor of Communications and Media Studies	Arab Open University, Denmark
Assistant Professor of Media and Mass Communication	Adamam University
PhD student, Communications and Media	Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University
Assistant Professor of Communications and Media Studies	King Saud University
Professor of Public Relations	Sharjah University, UAE
Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication	King Saud University
Assistant Professor of Media and Journalism	Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University
Manager, Information Centre for Arabic and Russian Studies	Information Centre for Arabic and Russian Studies
Saudi journalist, Economic Affairs	<i>Middle East Arab News</i>

Appendix 7: Interview questions for Pilot Study

General questions for all interviewees

1. What does the term 'citizen journalism' mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what impact has citizen journalism had on Saudi society?
3. Do you think there should be a code of professional ethics designed to guide citizen journalists in their practice? Why do you think this is needed?
4. How would you classify citizen journalism in the KSA?
5. How do you view the future of citizen journalism in the KSA?

Section A: Interview questions for licensed professional journalists

1. What does the term 'citizen journalism' mean to you?
2. Do you use content from citizen journalism in your work as a professional journalist?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. If yes, how do you use this?
4. Do you think citizen journalism poses a threat to professional journalism?
5. In your opinion, what is the difference between a professional journalist and a citizen journalist?
6. What are the main differences between citizen journalism and professional journalism?
7. Has citizen journalism impacted on your work as a journalist?
 - a. Positively - In which ways?
 - b. Negatively - In which ways?
8. Is there anything else would like to add?

Section B: Interview questions for Authorized Journalists

1. What does the term 'citizen journalism' mean to you?
2. Have you personally ever been involved in citizen journalism?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. What is your opinion on the rise of citizen journalism?

4. In your view, has citizen journalism affected Saudi society positively?
5. Can you think of a specific example of how citizen journalism has contributed to greater public understanding of an event?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. If yes, please elaborate.
7. Does citizen journalism positively affect your work as a journalist? In which ways?
8. Do you think other media platforms should embrace citizen journalism? Why?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Is there anything else would like to add?

Section C: Interview questions for Public Figures

1. What does the term 'citizen journalism' mean to you?
2. Would you consider yourself to be a citizen journalist?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. If yes, what inspired you to become involved in citizen journalism? What kind of media content do you contribute?
4. Do you follow news from citizen journalists regularly?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. In your view, what is the greatest advantage of being a citizen journalist?
6. Can you think of any ethical issues that have emerged from your work as a citizen journalist?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Is there anything else would like to add?

Appendix 8: Interview questions for main study

General questions for all interviewees:

1. What does the term “citizen journalist” mean to you?
2. Do you think that there should be an Ethical Charter to regulate the work of citizen journalists in the KSA? Why?
3. In your opinion, what impact has citizen journalism had on Saudi society?
4. Why do you think Twitter is such a popular social media platform for citizen journalists in the KSA?
5. In your opinion what prompted the emergence of citizen journalism in the KSA?
6. Which do you think has the greatest impact on Saudi readers: traditional press or citizen journalism? Why?
7. In your opinion, which has played the more important role in raising awareness among Saudis about economic issues: the economic press or citizen journalism? Why?
8. How do you think citizen journalism will develop in the KSA?

Section A: Interview questions for licensed professional journalists

1. How has citizen journalism impacted on your work as a professional journalist?
2. Do you think the relationship between citizen journalism and professional journalism can create difficult situations for journalists?
3. In your opinion, what are the differences between citizen journalism and Professional Journalism?

Section B: Interview questions for authorized economic columnists

1. What does the term “citizen journalist” mean to you?
2. Has citizen journalism impacted on your work as an economic affairs columnist in the local press? Can you give a specific example?
3. In your opinion, when did citizen journalism start in the KSA? What prompted this?
4. Would you describe yourself as a citizen journalist? What kind of media content do you contribute?
5. Why do you use citizen journalism for discussing economic issues?
6. Which are the most active media platforms for Saudi citizen journalists?

7. Do you think that other media platforms visual, audio and print should embrace citizen journalism? Why?
8. Who represents the citizen journalist on social media?
9. What are the differences between how economic issues are covered by professional journalists in the press and citizen journalists on social media?
10. Can you think of any specific examples of how citizen journalism has improved awareness and understanding of economic issues?
11. If you received some information that your newspaper editor prevented you from publishing as an economic columnist, would you use your Twitter account to tweet this? Is there a code of professional ethics that you would follow in this case?
12. Why do you think Twitter is such a popular social media platform for citizen journalists in the KSA?
13. In your opinion, what impact has citizen journalism had on Saudi society?
14. Which do you think has the greatest impact on Saudi readers: traditional press or citizen journalism? Why?
15. In your opinion, which has played the more important role in raising awareness among Saudis about economic issues: the economic press or citizen journalism? Why?
16. How do you think citizen journalism will develop in the KSA?

Section C: Interview questions for Public Figures

1. What does the term "citizen journalist" mean to you?
2. How do you explain citizen journalism in the KSA?
3. Have you ever been a citizen journalist? Why?
4. In your opinion, when did citizen journalism start in the KSA? What prompted this?
5. Would you describe yourself as a citizen journalist? What kind of media content do you contribute?
6. Who represents the citizen journalist on social media?
7. Which are the most active media platforms for Saudi citizen journalists?
8. In your opinion, what are the main advantages of practicing citizen journalism-on economic issues using social media?
9. Can you think of any specific examples of how citizen journalism has improved awareness and understanding of economic issues?

10. In your opinion, would there be any benefits in having an Ethical Charter for citizen journalism?
11. Do you think that citizen journalism should be regulated? Why? Why not?
12. Why do you think Twitter is such a popular social media platform for citizen journalists in the KSA?
13. In your opinion, what impact has citizen journalism had on Saudi society?
14. Which do you think has the greatest impact on Saudi readers: traditional press or citizen journalism? Why?
15. In your opinion, which has played the more important role in raising awareness among Saudis about economic issues: the economic press or citizen journalism? Why?
16. How do you think citizen journalism will develop in the KSA?

Appendix 9: Examples of tweets in #Royal_decrees_2015

Tweets about payment of a two-month salary to Saudi public sector employees

CODE	TWEET
TNews24	About bonus payment of a two-month salary to government employees.
T60	About bonus payment of a two-month salary to government employees.
T50	About bonus payment of a two-month salary to government employees.
T42	As a result of this payment, government employees did not need to fear rising prices "As long as we have Tawfiq Al Rabe'a among us".
T77	He would spend his bonus on his family starting with his "beloved precious mother, his wife and his children"

Tweets about establishing an economic council/re-shaping the cabinet

CODE	TWEETS
@SaudiNews50	Tweet concerning the establishment of the Council for Economic Affairs
@AjelNews24	News about new ministerial appointments in the cabinet showed large variety
@AjelNews24	Appointment of Sheikh Dr. Saed Al Shethri as advisor to the Royal Court
@ Al Arabiya	News about establishing an economic council.

Tweets about an increase in viewers for Saudi national channel

CODE	TWEETS
T07	Saudi Channel 1 "at those times" i.e. when the Royal Decrees are being announced, had the largest numbers of viewers since the death of King Fahd in 2005.
T90	"To those who wish to watch #Channel_1 to follow #Royal_Decrees but do not have a TV, this is the link
T1046	I know you removed the channel a long time ago.
T357	The number of viewers of Channel 1 right now is 30 million. It was three old men a few minutes ago
T377	People are asking about the frequency for Saudi Channel. They've all removed [it]"
T87	The host is shy. It's the first time this many people have watched him
T700	the Saudi Channel 1's presenter will be "nervous" the reason being that:"Suddenly, all the nation is watching Channel 1. [...] He's not used to anyone watching him."
T879	the most important achievement since King Salman came to power was that he had succeeded in making people watch Channel 1.
T909	Channel 1's presenters, tweeting that they were "in trouble. They've all gone to get a shave!! They didn't expect that the whole of Saudi Arabia was going to watch them today."
T648	The Saudi nation is watching Channel 1
T649	When did Channel 1's logo change?"
T650	"We'll see you again on the eve of Ramadan"

Tweets about modernising Saudi Arabia

CODE	TWEETS
T2002	Referred to the KSA as undergoing "a process of reformatting", using this term to describe the radical change taking place in the country since the start of King Salman's rule. The same tweeter explained: "The Kingdom is being modernized".
T160	"The Kingdom is being modernized"

T80	"King Salman has carried out a reformat of Saudi Arabia
T15	"King Salman has reformatted everything in the Kingdom
T59	"Saudi Arabia is starting a new era in its history"
T59	"A new era. We ask Allah for success".
T59	"King Salman is renewing the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia is being modernized"
T59	"Saudi Arabia is being updated"
T767	"These ministerial posts require trustworthiness and are not honorary"

Tweets that show Royal decrees represent Saudi Public Interest

CODE	TWEETS
T1090	All you can hear is hush, hush
T2480	The thing you could hear most during the speech was 'hush, hush'
T609	"Hush, hush, he's started talking",
T20	The situation of the Saudi people
T206	An image of a mobile phone without a sim card indicating the user did not want to be disturbed by any calls during King Salman's speech.
T1099	Image showed a group of young men paying close attention to something on television and another group watching Channel 1 and raising their hands in prayer, hoping for good news
T907	An image of a crowd watching a large screen in a park with the caption: "The Saudi people now".
T709	Images featuring two children wearing large glasses and watching television
T2018	A father watching television with his children, captioned "The Saudi people right now"
T641	An image of many eyes, also indicating the importance of following the event.
T505	"The Saudi nation awaits the issuance of the Royal Decrees" (The same tweet copy was employed by different users over 10 times)
T908	"Breaking news. The Saudi nation is awaiting the Royal Decrees"

Tweets thanking King Salman

CODE	TWEETS
T500	May Allah grant him more faith and kindness" "
T1092	"You have brought joy to your people with your economic decisions and reassured them about their future"
T952	"May Allah bring joy to his heart as he has brought joy to [ours]"
T84	King Salman's Decrees would "bring happiness and comfort to the Saudi people and that his #Royal_Decrees were largely welcomed"
T700	"Thank you Servant of the Two Holy Shrines. Thank you, our King. Thank you. Thank you"
T909	"May Allah bring with these Decrees good things for us and for our nation. May He lead our King to all goodness and may He vouch safe for us the blessings of security and prosperity".
T4381	"May Allah grant you a long life"
T4382	"King Salman's generosity to his people"
T2087	"May Allah bring joy to the heart of the Servant of the Custodian of the Two holy Mosques and increase his wealth".
T223	The "goodness and giving" in the Royal Decrees was reflected in the new Cabinet appointments and the decision to improve housing and provide the bonuses for Saudi citizens
T200	"May Allah make these decisions a good omen for us all and guide our King to all that is good and righteous"

Tweets offering prayer for the late King Abdullah

CODE	TWEETS
T599	Posted an image of King Abdullah in his tweet, adding: "Amid these joyful Royal Decrees, there is a man who always made us happy. Do not forget him in your prayers"
T212	"You, the most precious person in the nation's heart, are in Allah's safekeeping. May you rest in peace"
T25	"In the midst of your happiness at the Royal Decrees, do not forget the one who said in his will: "Do not forget to pray for me". May Allah have mercy on him and forgive him".

Appendix 10: Examples of tweets in #White_Lands_Tax
Tweets by other citizen journalists

CODE	TWEETS
CJ1	A photograph of the Cabinet’s decision to officially impose tax, with some of the key points in the announcement underlined in red accompanied by the comment “Congratulations to all Saudis”.
CJ1	He also added some of the basic regulations to be enacted when the system came into operation and the impact of this on the Saudi real estate market and housing crisis, drawing on statistics he had published in his article in <i>Al Eqtisadiyah</i> .
CJ1	Tweeted about his forthcoming TV interviews talking about the Law and its effect on the lives of Saudi citizens.
CJ2	Tweeted a link to an article he wrote about the new Decree only one hour after it was issued, entitled “20 facts about the executive regulations for White Lands’ Tax”.
CJ2	Some users asked who had to pay this tax while others commented that the most important thing was to take action not to issue laws and regulations
CJ2	Posted links to TV interviews in which he talked about the Decree.
CJ3	Tweeted about the Decree and described land speculation in the KSA as “the greatest crime committed against the nation and its citizens”.
CJ3	Tweeted about white lands tax “economic reform” and tweeted in the same hashtag that these speculators have “stolen the country’s lands and the citizens’ dreams”.
CJ3	Answer questions from many users about whether the tax would “apply to all without exceptions” and concluded by saying “You heard it here first”,
CJ4	“Breaking News: the Cabinet agrees to the White Lands’ Tax project and sets 180 days to prepare the executive regulations Congratulations to all”.
CJ4	Tweeted about the main features of the system approved by the Cabinet and the level of tax to be imposed
CJ4	Answer citizens’ questions about how long it would take to solve the housing crisis
CJ4	Some questioned whether the Decree would apply to land speculators such as princes and ministers, he confirmed that it would apply to all.
CJ4	Referred to the Decree as “historic”, stressing that it would “play a role in solving the housing crisis” for Saudi citizens
CJ4	Tweeted links to videos explaining the Decree from an economic point of view that he had posted on his Snapchat account and uploaded to youtube.
CJ5	Tweeted about the stages in which the Decree would be implemented and addressed land monopolists land speculators in 30 tweets
CJ5	“It is shameful for land owners to avoid paying tax on land they acquired for free!”,

Saudi Traditional press tweets

CODE	TWEETS
T9	The fact that the area of the White Lands equalled that of three countries while the second featured 11 questions and answers regarding the White Lands’ Tax Decree.
T5	Tweeted about <i>Mecca’s</i> coverage on the White Lands’ Tax, referring to it as “the best because it applied multimedia in a good way”.
T24	Praised Al Zamel’s Snapchat account for being “brilliant in explaining how to benefit from the Tax Decree”.

Tweets about the role of *Monopoly* in relation to White Lands' Tax

CODE	TWEETS
RT 700 TIMES	700 tweets praised the content of this film for raising awareness on this issue and helping to make the Decree a reality, noting that "all credit goes to the film <i>Monopoly</i> ".
T407	"Began with a film which was followed by a struggle to raise awareness about the issue and ended with a Decree", adding that the film's "good scenario" had contributed to non-violent reform.
T504	<i>Monopoly</i> was "the first to raise the subject" making it an issue of "public interest".
T556	Quoted the tweet from Al Zamel's Twitter account in which he announced the film, commenting that "The story of the struggle began here".
T929	The "message of the film" had been successful.

Tweets thanking citizen journalists in the KSA

CODE	TWEETS
RT200 TIMES	"Thank you" repeated 1200 times with citizen journalists being praised 800 times for their efforts.
T	Tweets included photographs of citizen journalists and thanked them.
	Land tax "only an idea in 2013" but became "reality in 2015"
T303	Thanked the public figures with influence and described them as "fighting for this Decree".
T39	Mentioned Issam Al Zamel as having fought for this issue since 2009
T1053	Describing Abdel Hamid Al Omari as "protector of the interests of ordinary people".
T703	Described the Decree as "a victory for the voice of the people"
T904	Referred to Twitter as "the Saudi people's parliament"
T969	Tweets about CJ 4 "fought for four years to make [it] a reality".
T957	Praised the roles of both Al Zamel and Al Omari.
T901	"history will remember Al Omari, Al Zamel and Al Alkami",
T915	"Champions of consumer rights fighting for the interests of the country and its citizens" "Continue their difficult struggle until suitable regulations are issued"
T922	A "historic" day for Al Zamel, Al Omari and Al Alkami
T2077	Reminded users that following the Decree, <i>Time Magazine</i> had chosen Issam Al Zamel as personality of the year in 2015 and provided the link to Al Zamel, congratulating him for this achievement.
T98	Expressed his gratitude to Twitter for contributing to "building awareness among citizens" and helping to build "united opinion" against land speculators.
T976	The state responded to the will of the people".
T985	"Twitter heroes speaking for the interests of the nation and its citizens have won the battle".

Tweets criticising Prince Mishal and the elite

CODE	TWEETS
T24	Tweeted an image of Prince Mishal's with a sarcastic comment saying that the Decree will not be implemented using the phrase "Shut up".
T2986	Tweeted Mishal's photo commenting "This guy has fenced off half the Kingdom's lands" and the state will get "millions out of him" in taxes.
T958	The Decree would apply to everyone, especially princes.
T200	Tweeted sarcastically about the Decree commenting that those who do not pay their electricity bills will not be expected to pay White Lands' Tax.
T950	Decree was a "farce" and asked how someone who has not paid his electricity bills

	for the last 30 years could be expected to pay land tax.
T953	If those who live in palaces do not pay electricity bills, it would be impossible to impose tax on land owners
T3000	The Decree would be “just words on paper” as the “those in power have immunity”
RT	“We have grown old waiting for this historic moment”
T503	“The citizens were the biggest winners with a rate of 98%”.
T809	"Twitter revolution on this decision-making site and would be implemented".

Tweets thanking the government

CODE	TWEETS
T190	“Historic night that the Kingdom never dreamed would come” and ended his tweet by thanking King Salman
T3700	“A historic economic decision that will change the future of our economy”.
T204	“Decisive day in the history of the KSA”
T316	The solution to the greatest “problem” in the country’s history
T4013	A “lethal blow to land traders and the greedy”.
T932	“An excellent decision and history will remember King Salman”
T3509	“Best decision” of 2015.

Tweets referring to the end of the age of monopoly

CODE	TWEETS
T329	“A fall” in land prices,
T409	The Decree would “reap double benefits” as it was “supporting the economy and reducing land prices”.
T944	The Decree would help citizens find homes.
T108	Today marked the “end of the age of monopoly”, with others using the term “land mafia”.
T2099	Tweeted “Bye bye to monopolizing”

Discussion about political ideologies following Royal Decree on #White_Lands_Tax

CODE	TWEETS
T14	Asked aboshla5libraly to put the same question to Al Qarni.
T60	The <i>jamiah</i> i.e. The conservative islamists change their <i>fatwas</i> once or twice a day.
T81	The Sheikh was an expert on the older version of Islam and because the question concerned the modern version, he would not be able answer it.
T11	“Talk softly and respectfully with the Sheikh... For he is the supervisor of old Islam”.
T5	Al Rayyes was two-faced and that if he was interviewed after the Decree was issued, he would say that it was wise and in accordance with <i>sharia</i> .
T72	The <i>fatwas</i> that were issued “agreed with anything approved by the state, including the participation of women in the senate, land tax and opening shops at prayer times”.
T58	Al Rayyes did not speak in the name of Islam or <i>sharia</i> but simply to please certain people in the name of religion.
T42	Al Rayyes, commenting that he would claim his account had been hacked by someone.
T31	Some clergymen’s <i>fatwas</i> changed according to the weather conditions, emphasizing Al Rayyes’ inconsistency on certain issues.
T67	Sheikh Al Rayyes was “a two-faced man” and that if he was interviewed after the

	Decree was issued, he would say that it was wise and in accordance with sharia.
T39	The fatwas that were issued agreed with anything approved by the state, including the participation of women in the senate, land tax and opening shops at prayer times
T29	Ridiculed Al Rayyes, commenting that “He will say his account has been hacked by someone”.
T65	Some clergymen’s fatwas changed according to “the weather conditions”, emphasising the Sheikh’s inconsistency on certain issues.

Discussion about social inequality and the Royal Decree on #White_Lands_Tax

CODE	TWEETS
T100	Tweeted against the decree arguing that it would make land owners raise land prices not cut them.
T400	“I remembered after the decree was issued how a person born with a silver spoon in his mouth sees things... Attitudes of the rich”.
T309	“You will pay” was repeated 30
T628	When will you pay?” Appeared 10 times.

Appendix 11: Examples of tweets in #Royal Decrees 2016
Users' interactions concerning the Decrees with citizen journalists

CODE	TWEETS
T78	Posted a video in which he talks about an article written by citizen journalist, Al Zamel, on 22 January 2015. The video posed the same question as Al Zamel's article: "Will the Saudi government become unable to pay its employees' salaries?"
T88	Posted an article that Al Zamel had previously published in his blog about nine months before the Decrees were issued. His article predicted the transformation of Saudi Arabia from a revenue-based country to a productive one
T309	Asks if the cancelled annual allowance would be reinstated next year
T310	The decisions needed to be clarified by an official with accurate information from the right sources.
T318	Ask if the change in salary payment methods from the Islamic calendar to the Gregorian one would affect the validity of personal documents such as driving licences and ID cards.
T320	Posted a question to the Ministry of Labor and the Recruitment Committee on whether salaries for domestic assistants would also be cut.
T322	The 2016 Royal Decrees would have larger and more complex effects on the Saudi economy than the small-scale analyses of economists could predict: "if we were to follow what these economists say, it would naturally follow that the prices of goods would go down. This is a basic rule of economy"
T314	The people will not be convinced by cutting benefits and allowances in order to support Sisi, Lebanon and others [...] "We [Saudis] are in the middle of a crisis and we hope that everyone will pull together, princes first, then ordinary citizens".
T301	Retweeted tweets by citizen journalists such as Fadel Al Boainain concerning salaries, mentioning that it is the largest of the budget items, putting pressure on incomes. Mentioned Al Zamel's tweets about the Decrees, which he said "are very painful and will have a significant effect on living standards. But are a necessary evil". He also quoted Al Zamel's tweets: "the continued fall of oil prices has exacerbated the deficit and much of our foreign reserves, which are the two safeguards for the stable value of the Saudi Riyal" and "we have failed to build a productive economy and any decisions to be taken following these austerity decisions will have a negative reaction".
T809	These government decisions would affect real estate prices outside urban areas, possibly leading to a fall in property prices in areas where there are still no utilities.

Patriotic tweets about the 2016 Royal Decrees

CODE	TWEETS
T65	"I will sacrifice my soul and my money for my country"
T98	We stand by our country in good times and bad and obey and follow our King in peace and war
T76	Tweets about warnings against enemies of the state who were trying to harm it
T209	"We stand by our nation and its leaders in good times and bad. We must not believe rumors aiming at distracting people and spreading confusion among them".
T201	"We obey and follow in good times and bad, in war and peace.
T212	"The country did not spare us its help in times of prosperity. Now, in times of hardship, citizens must accept the Decrees and support their country. This hardship will not last, God willing".
T105	"These Decrees mean that the country needs our help. We must stand by it and

	not allow these Decrees to be a good opportunity for those who seek to topple us and our government".
T58	"We stand by our country in good times and bad. We shall not follow those who mean harm to our country, we shall not listen to them and become hypocrites".
T84	"Beware of discussing these issues in a negative way in front of children and denigrating the country. Such words could become fixed in their minds for the rest of their lives".
T96	"A country cannot be your country in good times only! Real patriotism is when you stand by and support your country at its times of crisis".
T94	Posted an image of a Saudi soldier and a Saudi citizen holding hands saying "Security is everyone's responsibility. We stand by our country and obey our leaders and their Royal Decrees".
T28	"Better to lose an allowance than to lose a country. This should be our motto" and continued "the country's enemies do not want to see it stable and they exploit and exaggerate any decisions made".
T32	"Maybe this will be for the good".
T91	" We are not worthy of living in a country we do not protect"
T23	Tweeted a picture of King Salman and commented "we obey the Royal Decrees"
T72	May you stay powerful, o nation. Your people will be with you in good times and bad
T29	"It is so reassuring to see that the people stand by their government. Paid people and accounts inciting against Saudi Arabia did not make the headlines".
T44	The best choice for the future of our country and our children"
T69	"they assume they love the country but are the first to challenge the King's decisions"
T444	Posted an image from Snapchat of a foreign article published in 1993 in the British <i>Sunday Times</i> newspaper with a comment attached to it. He added an Arabic translation of the content of the article noting that it "mentions that Saudi Arabia, with its high oil reserves and legendary wealth, is heading towards bankruptcy which will have disturbing implications on the Western world".
T43	Standing by one's country is the right behavior and that all citizens must show allegiance to their country in both good times and bad. "the war in Yemen, internal terrorism, the Iranian threat, the Western media attack and the fall in oil prices".
T43	"We obey God, His Prophet and our guardian monarch"
T65	Describing the role of the Saudi army in the south as that of defending the country and defeating the enemy with weapons.
T60	"We were with you in times of prosperity, o motherland. We will stick by our country, its leaders and its people in times of hardship before times of prosperity".
T85	We support the country's most important interests. This country's security is above everything else".
T38	The state stood by us in times of prosperity and gave us everything. We reaped the fruits of the good days and now we must stand by the state in times of hardship".
T15	"a kind of disaster inflicting Saudi citizens" adding that "in times of despair, real nationalism is revealed".
T421	Posted a video by an Islamic preacher which mentions a hadith stressing that a believer's livelihood is guaranteed by the Creator. He concluded his tweet with the phrase "praise be to God" indicating his belief in fate.
T54	Mentioned the following hadith: "If anyone among you is secure in mind in his life, healthy in body and has food for today, it is as though the whole world has been brought into his possession".

Tweets critical of the 2016 Royal Decrees

CODE	TWEETS
T144	"The people pay for the government's failure
T05	"The country is living in a real crisis. Instead of countering the corruption of princes, the citizens are bearing the cost
T15	Asked: "Will they be able to stop the country from being dependent on oil by relying on cutting citizens' salaries and imposing taxes?"
T270	"It is clear that Vision 2030 is based on cutting government spending and subsidies and raising taxes [...] "people were happy with Vision 2030 but are now sad".
T511	"one of the objectives of Vision 2030 is to get rid of poverty, not to get rid of the poor"
T503	"Everyday Vision 2030 vision proves it will only take money from citizens' pockets".
T66	"Whenever there is a financial surplus, the rich benefit the most and whenever there is a financial crisis, the poor are the only ones to suffer
T98	"Silencing mouths from criticizing in the name of patience is not a religious or a logical approach".
T45	"Some people expect nationalism and demand patience"
T87	"If those with fortunes would distribute their money in times of prosperity, the deficit would end"
T33	"you must change the draining of the budget by the upper class, not citizens" and urged users: "Contribute to the country's development, do not be its enemy".
T504	"The austerity phase must include everyone".
T34	Described the state of the Saudi people following the Royal Decrees with the phrase "Strangers in surplus, partners in deficit"
T503	Described the Decrees as "operation reductions storm" as an analogy between the cuts on the Saudi citizen's benefits. It appeared that those who participated in tweets under the name #Reductions_Storm were from Yemen
T83	Described the day the Decrees were issued as "black Monday"
T437	"People are stunned by the yes-men and hypocrites and how they allow others to violate their rights"
T52	"A good citizen pays twice. He pays the price for corruption and the price to correct what was corrupted a long time ago".
T12	"Why do citizens alone end up paying for the mistakes? Correcting errors that have been committed is a waste of public money".

Tweets providing solutions to financial cuts imposed by the 2016 Royal Decrees

CODE	TWEETS
T16	posted an infographic explaining how to manage family expenses and advice on how to save money
T309	"a balanced Saudi economy during a critical period facing the region in the form of wars and conspiracies in the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular"
T502	posted an image depicting what is happening in Saudi Arabia, noting that it was "a part of a global economic crisis and the result of falling oil prices".
T312	posted a suggestion by King Salman to look at the effect of cuts on military personnel salaries as this sector would be largely affected by the cancelling of annual benefits and allowances
T508	"need for a press conference to explain the goals of the Royal Decrees so that evil-minded individuals are not given the chance to influence citizens and steer them against their country".
T70	posted a video providing helpful money-saving tips such as making lists of daily and monthly expenses

Appendix 12: Examples of tweets in #saudi_vision_2030

Event-related tweets for #saudi_vision_2030

CODE	TWEETS
T1	Saudi Arabia's global and regional significance
T2	References to Saudi Arabia building the largest Islamic museum in the world in Riyadh and making this accessible to non-Muslim visitors
T3	Changing the Saudi Public Investment Fund into a leading international investment institution
T4	Prince Mohammed bin Salman's interview
T5	"The country's youth will fuel this vision"
T6	"The Kingdom will be a powerful country we will all be proud of"

International reaction to Vision 2030 tweets

CODE	TWEETS
T7	This is a vision full of ambition and hope for the Kingdom and region and will be implemented by a young leadership that has surprised the world with its achievements.
T8	An enormous step not only for Saudi Arabia but for the region as a whole towards more superiority and achievement.
T9	Prince Mohammed bin Salman launches Vision 2030 and brings hope.
T10	A plan reflecting ambition and optimism in a bright Saudi future.
T11	The road towards the flourishing and growth of the region
T12	A step forward for Saudi Arabia
T13	The words of my brother, Mohammed bin Salman, envision the future and hold national and strategic dimensions that will benefit the Kingdom and the region
T14	We wish the Kingdom and its wise leadership the best of luck and success that serves the interests of the Arab and Islamic worlds
T15	I found in the interview of His Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman a bright and brave vision, which will play a great role in developing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Local optimism about Vision 2030 tweets

CODE	TWEETS
T16	The geographical location of Saudi Arabia has power in both the Arab and Muslim worlds and is a source of investment for the Kingdom
T17	It is a vision of youth. The language and aspirations of youth are self-criticism and truthful hopes".
T18	A son of the nation worthy of a bright future
T19	Our vision
T20	For a prosperous nation and promising generations
T21	Government and people have to work together to achieve this
T876	Comfortable and content as a young Saudi man about it, as it would raise his status and assure him about his future
T64	Assure us about our futures at all levels and at all sectors of society.
T33	He believes the Prince's encouragement and trusts the King and Crown Prince and hopes to contribute to the vision's success
T26	A good vision for Saudi Arabia and its children.
T25	A stable and ambitious vision
T28	A better future within Islamic sharia

T234	Not only a renaissance for the Kingdom but for the whole region
T31	Saudi Arabia is the source of Arab and Islamic cultural strength
T32	Regional leadership for global competition
T35	Towards a promising future
T467	Unprecedented in the history of Saudi Arabia
T36	Thank you because our country has made the best choice and has decided to embrace optimism, achievement and ambition.
T56	Vision 2030 requires a change of mind by citizens
T940	It is not wrong or unreasonable that after spending years whipping and criticising your country, you are suddenly happy to hear about various development plans such as the Vision 2030

Tweets about transparency and Vision 2030

CODE	TWEETS
T37	Transparent and giving hope in a better future
T634	Transparency was evident through awareness of weaknesses and strengths and the responsibility of all in implementing the vision
T296	Liked the fact that problems were admitted
T42	A good start to self-criticism
T186	Very true words, sorry to say Criticism of the performance of the anti-corruption committee
T302	This is a mind thinking clearly and not saying nonsense
T266	The government's transparency towards Vision 2030 contributed to the society's acceptance of change and national transformation
T50	Should be an area of community participation and is considered #Responsible_Social_Behavior by the government.

Tweets about Mbs's speech

CODE	TWEETS
T39	The people judge, the people observe
T111	With bin Salman, only the poor will be exalted.
T804	Bin Salman's words represent social justice: let's pray the statements will be implemented in reality.
T44	Prince's speech offered comfort and made all Saudis proud

Tweets about Saudi Arabia's post-oil era

CODE	TWEETS
T57	This is the dawn of Saudi Arabia starting a post-oil era
T1095	A courageous step by Prince Mohammed bin Salman
T38	We should get rid of our oil addiction which is not part of the Saudi constitution.
T823	We have become addicted to oil but Saudi Arabia was built by men not by oil.
T475	We have indeed concentrated on oil and forgotten other good things
T79	Depend on God, Mohammed; God and your people are with you for post-oil economic development
T531	Separating oil from the state is a philosophy of re-mobilization of wealth; if Mohammed bin Salman vision was supported in his vision, he would become a future "bin Maktoum".

Tweets referring to Saudi Arabia's past in support of Vision 2030

CODE	TWEETS
T618	Reminding us of historical stances is of great importance. A leader can build

	future plans based on these positions
T2061	King Abdul Aziz's management of Saudi Arabia during his reign and his defiance of colonial rule without oil
T2130	The steady steps of the grandchild of the founder King Abdul Aziz
T739	King Abdul Aziz and his men founded Saudi Arabia and defied British colonialism without oil
T144	I saw the features of the founder, the genius of King Salman, the smile of Sultan and the cleverness of Nayef
T2384	it is great to be part of this national transformation connecting Vision 2030 with the country's people.
T2384	We cannot achieve a model for the nation if citizens retain old ways of thinking.
T2384	The fuel for the forthcoming transformation, God willing
T202	South Korea had concentrated on two ministries only to achieve change: education and health.
T2497	Countries that do not own oil resources but have brought massive change to their infrastructure

Tweets about MbS

CODE	TWEETS
T1189	Prince Mohammed bin Salman's words are commonsense
T390	Enjoyed watching the interview and thanked the Prince for proposing Vision 2030
T106	Spontaneous, knows all the details, bold and believes in risk-taking.
T2119	You are the pride of our religion. You are the whole nation
T952	Mohammed bin Salman, you are the right man at the right time
T520	The king of change and a symbol of [Saudi] culture, Mohammed bin Salman
T2486	The architect of the Saudi economy
T90	Saudi Arabia with Mohammed bin Salman looks forward to a better tomorrow
T968	Mohammed bin Salman has enlightenment, eloquence and wisdom greatly exceeding his age
T904	He gave clear answers without any ambiguity. I am very optimistic about him.
T33	Prince Mohammed bin Salman surprised me. He is an exceptional man!
T2250	Prince Mohammed bin Salman's vision is that of every economist who knows the economic game
T81	Prince Mohammed bin Salman showed during his speech that he is completely informed of the Kingdom's problems through his communication with experts.
T82	You are the hope of the <i>Ummah</i> Islamic World. May God protect you.

Tweets in support of Vision 2030

CODE	TWEETS
T61	May God make it a vision of good and blessing. May He protect the country and grant it His blessings and raise the flag of the religion of Islam and the traditions of the Prophet, Muhammad with the help of its rulers and people.
T62	I ask God to help our scholars, thinkers and people to join hands in the building process.
T71	Success for the country in achieving the vision and that it may be a vision of good and blessings.
T81	May God help the rulers and make these changes ones of good and blessings
T88	May God bring with these changes good things and blessings for us all
T745	May the vision succeed and bring good to the country and all Muslims
T1092	May the vision be in the best interests of all and may God protect Saudi Arabia and keep it safe and secure.

Tweets by citizen journalists

CODE	TWEETS
CJ1	The real challenge is not to set objectives but to achieve them, especially increasing exports, and we hope all resources will be utilized to achieve this
CJ1	If this goal is to be achieved, it will be the most important element in transforming a revenue-generating economy to a productive one. The rest of the objectives will be achieved as a result”.
CJ1	We are talking about one method to bring in millions of people and provide full citizenship rights
CJ1	We do not have to bring in millions of people There are many industrial countries with small populations such as Finland, Switzerland and others.
CJ2	I would be honored if you could follow me on “Ya Hala” program on the Gulf Rotana channel if you have time.
CJ2	I do not believe that the 2030 Vision will be achieved while we continue to run our government ministries with half ministers. Our ministers of health, education and agriculture are over-worked.
CJ3	Given the challenges and options, opportunities and dangers, the Vision 2030 program will not fail because of our criticism nor succeed as a result of our praise. It will only succeed if it provides the right ingredients for success
CJ3	Watch me tonight at 8 pm on “Ya Hala” program on Rotana channel. I will talk about Vision 2030 and the national transformation
CJ4	Do not hesitate to give your suggestions to the Economic and Development Council. They are in need of everyone’s interaction to build our future
CJ4	I would be honoured if you could follow me on SnapChat in a few minutes. I will talk about the 2030 Saudi Vision, a critical review
CJ4	Thoughts on large parts of the vision. Honestly, read my article.
CJ4	Honestly, it is as if I had written the Saudi Vision 2030 myself. You cannot imagine how surprised I was.
CJ5	For Vision 2030 to succeed, we must rely on technocrats and the young and we must eliminate favouritism and the old guard. Survival of the fittest

Appendix 13: Ethical Approval for the Study



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Research, Innovation and Academic
Engagement Ethical Approval Panel

Research Centres Support Team
60.3 Joubin House
University of Salford
M6 4WT

T +44(0)161 295 7013

www.salford.ac.uk/

18 November 2016

Dear Aljawhara,

RE: ETHICS APPLICATION AMR1617-05 – Citizen Journalism, the Public Interest, and Twitter in Saudi Arabia

Based on the information you provided, I am pleased to inform you that your application AMR 1617-05 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project and/ or its methodology, please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting A&M-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Newbery'.

Dr Samantha Newbery
Chair of the Arts & Media Research Ethics Panel
Lecturer in Contemporary Intelligence Studies
School of Arts and Media
Crescent House, CH210
University of Salford
Salford M6 4WT
t: +44 (0) 161 295 3860
s.l.newbery@salford.ac.uk