The Influence of Social Media on Gendered Identity in Saudi Arabia, in Relation to the Religious Curriculum throughout Saudi Schools

MEDIA, POLITICS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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In The Name of God the Most Gracious the Most Merciful

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Lina Khashogji

23/06/2016

DEDICATION

To My Parents, My gratitude and appreciation for your unconditional love, care, and support are beyond words, beyond expression. I love you from the bottom of my heart.

To My Brother: Thank you for being the best, I love you.

To My Religion: Islam, The Religion of *Peace*, *Mercy* and *Forgiveness*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the influence of Twitter on the development of female individualism in Saudi Arabia in relation to the religious curriculum. It reveals the process of this development through two different environments, the physical environment in religious education and the virtual environment in the form of Twitter.

The thesis is based on a combination of methods (largely qualitative data obtained from observations, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires). It develops a theoretical framework based on gendered identity as the central concept of this research. The framework positions this concept within two fields of research: feminist approaches to gender and psychological approaches to identity.

This thesis presents an innovative approach to the analysis of female individuality. Methodologically, the thesis establishes a position that informs the overall analysis between two different settings, i.e., the physical environment of Saudi schools, which illustrates long-established definitions of the Saudi female as the foundational unit of the analysis. It then moves to an analysis of these definitions in the virtual environment of Twitter, revealing how the different characteristics of the virtual environment influence definitions of identity, the formation of perceptions and the relationships between authorities. In conclusion, the thesis presents significant findings and recommendations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

SECTION I

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> 'Our lives are lived partly in private and partly in public, and the two spheres constantly bump and scrape and spark against each other.'
>
> - David Dreble (Dreble, 2015)

1.1 Introduction

This statement was made by David von Dreble in his contribution to the September 21, 2015, issue of *Time Magazine*. While his claim was made in relation to the recent Kim Davis case in Kentucky about the blurred lines between one's personal belief and one's civic duty, it is still an interesting statement in the context of this thesis. Similar to the public and private spheres that 'bump and scrape and spark against each other', as Von Dreble (2015) vividly puts it, so does our internal authority for self-authorship against external forces, our instinctive opinions and what we learn from society, spark against each other. Contextually, this thesis explores if today, the school education and new social media such as Twitter have a compound effect on a sense of new female identity for Saudi women? Thus, this thesis presents a study of the influence of the social media platform "Twitter" on the development of female individualism in Saudi Arabia, in relation to previous Islamic education provided throughout Saudi schools.

1.2 Genesis of Study: A Personal Trajectory

Giving that "objectivity requires taking subjectivity into account" (Garry and Pearsall, 1996, p.206), the decision to study Saudi education, Twitter, and female individuality in Saudi Arabia was born of a combination of personal and professional experiences. Acknowledging the fact that researchers inevitably influence the form and content of their research and that subjectivity is an invariable component of their work (Peshkin, 1988), I felt it is important to present a personal experience, which formed the basis of this research. As a Saudi, I was raised in a private high school in Jeddah, one that followed the same Islamic curriculum investigated in this thesis. In school, I did not dare question my interpretation and perception about my religion, perhaps because we were taught that the external authority has the "unquestioned truth". Slowly with progressing years I realized that my ideologies on religious education being imparted in school were changing, and I developed three central ideas around the concept. First, it was increasingly difficult for me to identify with the religious curriculum being taught in school. Secondly, I started to have doubts about the implied attitude of this curriculum towards the Saudi woman as an Islamic identity. Thirdly, I was plagued by a constant fascination to pursue my own answers to the questions that puzzled me, in search of my own individuality. This led me to explore the depths of Saudi education and its effect on the formation of female individuality.

Moreover, while working as an editor on a leading Saudi socio-religious TV show in the Middle East, "Khawater: Thoughts"[1], from 2005 to 2008, I was extensively engaged with and exposed to the Saudi socio-religious media scene. There, I became

[1] "Khawater: Thoughts": A leading modern socio-religious TV show, presented by a Saudi young man, Ahmed Alshugairi, presenting a broad perspective on Islam.

fascinated with the extent of media influence on Saudi women and the challenge it posed in questioning their previous understanding of their religious education, which was fundamentally ingrained at school level. I was conscious of an impending impact of the advent of social media on the established identity of Saudi women. With the rising popularity of new social media platforms such as Twitter, the transition in Saudi society was apparent, and it was also suggestive of a significant impact in general. I spoke with Saudi women who described to me the change they went through as they started using new social media platforms.

I had initially distanced myself from the Saudi society, which was an inadvertent fallout from my life abroad. I was tempted to enter the scene again, and given the scarcity of relevant research papers or the apparent lack of general interest in that field, a detailed research was necessary. Thus, the thesis required a responsive researcher genuinely interested in understanding education, social media and female individuality in Saudi Arabia. As a female researcher who grew up in Saudi society and was subsequently exposed to a myriad of Western ideas and influences, this research was motivated by the complexity of defining the Saudi woman as an Islamic character in the age of social media.

1.3 Clarifying Terminology

- **Socio-Religious**

The choice of the term "socio-religious" is coined in an attempt to best describe the social, cultural, and religious complexities inherent in a discussion of the Saudi women's perceptions, and also present in the interactions between individuals whose

beliefs are rooted in misinterpreted religious concepts caused by education or social norms. When discussing a country like Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to draw arbitrary distinctions between social and religious perceptions. Hence, the term religious concept in Saudi may not necessarily describe religious practices or norms and may as well refer to deep seated societal norms and traditions, also this might just be the case for a social perception in reverse. There is always a possibility, that even the educational curriculum could misrepresent religious concepts and translate those misconceived perceptions into social norms, and vice versa. Therefore, there is a need to keep the social and the religious outlooks intertwined in this research.

- **Religious / Islamic Curriculum**

The term "Religious" or "Islamic" Curriculum has been used in this research; to represent the Islamic education given to the Muslims in their Islamic faith. These religious teachings are also sometimes referred to as Islamic education or religious education to represent the formal Islamic curriculum in Saudi Arabia. The latter has been applied to various types of Muslim education, and is a broad term that has been defined based on many Islamic interpretations. The actual religious significance and interpretations sometimes get lost in translation and are not considered in actual sense while designing of the Saudi Curriculum. Hence, the critical view in this thesis is not towards the teaching of the Islamic faith as an abstract religion, but to the specific interpretations of the Islamic text within the investigated curriculum.

- **Female Individuality**

The main research question examines the individuality of gendered identity, more specifically, "female identity" (in a specific country; Saudi Arabia), as a central concept in this thesis. Female individuality as it is researched in the thesis is an intersectional term for "human development". *Human* is being looked at from a particular gender, and *development* is being studied specifically through studying individualism, which is sometimes referred to as individuality. Hence, the thesis defines "female individuality" as the development of individualism from a gendered identity perspective. But what defines "individualism" and what is meant by "gendered identity" in this context? The answers to these questions are explained further in Chapter 3.

1.4 Research Rationale

The rationale for choosing to study this topic finds its basis in the above-mentioned personal interest, in this area of research. Broadly speaking, however, I believe that this research serves a greater purpose beyond deep personal fascination, in terms of its contribution to relevant fields of academic study and policy-making.

It is understood that social media are a significant force in the majority of human cultures. The global reach of new social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and even YouTube, is phenomenal. Every day, over 900 million different users connect to Facebook, over 80% of who are outside the United States of America (Social Bakers, 2015). This includes countries in which the website is banned by the government, such as China, where Facebook users must use third-party software to access it. This emphasizes its importance not only as a personal tool or toy, but also as an

irreplaceable social instrument. Similarly, about 500 million "tweets" are posted on a daily basis, attesting again to Twitter's role not only as a forum for discussion, but also as a starting point for global mobilization of people sharing common values and fighting for similar causes (Social Bakers, 2015). Although the list of the most popular Twitter accounts is saturated with Western celebrities, the list of the top 10 countries using Twitter includes countries from three different continents, according to a study on data collected in 2012 (Mocanu et al., 2013). Within the Arab world, the Saudi population has the highest number of Twitter users, 2.4 million, according to the 6th Arab Social Media Report (2014), Saudi Arabia represents 40% of all tweets posted in the Arab region. Therefore, Twitter has a prominent position vis-à-vis other social media platforms, namely Facebook and LinkedIn, which explains this study's focus on Twitter in Saudi Arabia specifically.

What makes Saudi Arabia stand out? In an "indoor-life" society, typical of Saudi Arabia, where social dynamics makes it such that people rarely leave the home without a purpose, where women are pressured into avoiding the public sphere; new social media has changed the face of society drastically. The current level of social and traditional media usage observed in Saudi Arabia is unprecedented. Only in recent years has the social media usage increase exponentially; a fact that makes the media a powerful educational and social influencer in the region.

According to my observations, new social media, and particularly Twitter, has different functions depending on the audience. The idea that they are shaped by their users and what the latter seeks and contributes to these platforms of virtual sociability is especially consistent as regards Saudi Arabia and Saudi women. Twitter is hugely

significant for Saudi female individuality, for two reasons. Firstly, in the absence of improvement in the educational system, the current system of social institutions teaches the virtues of female invisibility both physically and intellectually. This lack of improvement can be attributed to the power of religious authorities firmly resisting any step towards educational reform, and thus this education continues with little improvement over extended periods. As such, women are told that this is the best system for them, protected and marginalized from public social life and banned from participating not only in the development of society, the state, or the world but even from developing a coherent definition of themselves (Sakr, 2008). Therefore, new social media, especially Twitter, has become a crucial platform on which Saudi woman are allowed to exist and show their intellectual capacities by voicing an opinion for which they can take both credit or criticism. Either way, they are given a forum to learn about and express themselves (Hamdan, 2005).

Secondly, Saudi Arabia, as a highly religious and conservative country, is a society where people depend heavily on indoor activities and entertainment, such as Internet and video games. The lack of freedom to create meaningful social interactions has led people to depend on social media such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. In a way, Saudi people, notably women, have found a more humanized social structure in the virtual platform, than in the real, physical environment they live in. Owing to this inherent dependence, it can be safely assumed that Twitter is powerful in influencing Saudi culture. As further demonstrated in the next chapter, the Literature Review, Twitter in Saudi Arabia has not been the subject of many academic studies. In fact, most of the research on social media has been focused on Facebook. This research, therefore seeks to act as a bridge, filling the gap in the academic sphere regarding

three under-explored areas: Twitter's social impacts; female individuality in Saudi Arabia; and female education in Saudi Arabia.

It is noteworthy to understand why the question of gendered identity and education in Saudi Arabia are so pressing in light of global trends and events. This research aims to earn a meaningful place in the academic circles for academic research on Saudi society. In light of the events of September 11, 2001, the global stage has paid increasing attention to Saudi Arabia, especially in attempting to determine the origin and explanation for extremism within the fabric of Saudi society – particularly its religious education. Hence, it is of utmost importance to analyse closely education in Saudi Arabia. The current trends of academic research, under the influence of feminist thought, have provided a more significant platform for the study of women in various contexts (women's place in history, society, gender dynamics, and family life, and so on), and in this context it has become all the more essential to explore the dynamics and the emergence of a female individuality. "One is not born but becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 1973, p.301). This is the most famous and poignant line stated by one of the precursors of second-wave feminism in the western world, Simone de Beauvoir (1973). Her argument, which has since been widely accepted by other feminist scholars, establishes female identity and individuality as social constructs. Therefore, each society has its own way of projecting a model "feminine" image on the women that constitute it. In each society, this image is different. In Saudi Arabia, this image is both unique and under-explored. This thesis therefore furthers the global trend in academia that examines the creation of gendered identity, in the much-debated and controversial country of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this research devotes a great deal of time for analysis of the Saudi educational system, and it's shaping of Saudi female individuality, before examining the impact of Twitter on the same.

Traditionally, the purpose of educating women in Saudi Arabia is "to bring her up in a proper Islamic way so as to perform her duty in life, be an ideal and successful housewife and a good mother, ready to do things which suit her nature as teaching, nursing, and medical treatment" (Alireza, 1987 p.433). This thought dramatically changed when social media opened up new possibilities towards the new network society, which provided Saudi women with new sources of information, new levels of communication and connectivity, and a new model to represent and reflect on the dynamics of powers influencing their own cultural and individual development. As presented in the thesis, these opportunities are denied by the Saudi religious curricula. Many scholars, who have studied the religious curriculum reform in Saudi schools, focused on the elements of the curriculum in relation to terrorism and intolerance against other cultures and religions (Shea, Marshall and Haring, 2006), which is undoubtedly an important area to study. But a fundamental area that has been marginalized among scholars is the influence of these curricula on gendered, and especially female, individuality. A majority of research, investigating women and education in Saudi Arabia are either conducted in higher education, based on university-level women, or look at the subject from a teaching perspective, focusing on the educator, rather than the individuals being *educated*. Moreover, most studies on Islamic curriculum in Saudi Arabia are outdated, as they pre-date the emergence and exponential rising popularity of new social media, which shall be explained further in review of the relevant literature.

Young women are the focus of this research. Based on recent statistics from The Emirates Centre of Strategic Studies and Research in Arab Media and the Information Age, over half the people living in the Arab world are less than 25 years of age (UNESCO, 2012). They represent the future, and the future is dependent on the media

and education that can help them to develop personally and professionally. What effect do new social media have on the values and beliefs held by Saudi women because of their traditional education? What is the contribution of social media to the development of Saudi female individuality? What transformation can the social media bring in to the Saudi culture, bringing about a metamorphosis from being strongly anti-feminist to a culture that believes in women, and female empowerment, as the key to the country's development?

Dr. Ali Fakhro, a media leader in the Middle East, argues that in the past decades, voices in different Arab institutions, such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), or the Bureau of Education of the Gulf states, (Fakhro, 2006), have called for increased coordination and integration between media and educational institutions. Also several conferences were held on related topics, but the conferences did not provide any executive strategies that would lead to the creation of real coordination between the two fields. The research aims to answer these questions by analysing the recent situation in Saudi Arabia. These answers must be based on thorough analysis of personal experiences through research. Without these measures, the progress of media and education will remain unchecked. Moreover any excesses in the system would end up being controlled by a specific authoritative figure rather than through a coherent, long-term strategy for the future. The aim of this thesis is to be the first in a series of many that will be devoted to consistent and critical assessments of education, social media, and gendered identities in Saudi Arabia.

1.5 Research Objectives

The most important objectives of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. To examine the current level of female individualism in Saudi Arabia within the education system.

2. To identify the influence of new social media, namely Twitter, on female individuality in Saudi Arabia, compared to the impact of the educational environment.

3. To develop a new perspective between the dynamics of politics and religion, with relation to gender and social media.

1.6 Research Development

In 2010, my original proposal for this research outlined an exploration of the development of the Saudi individual in the age of social media. The intention was to focus on educational media such as e-learning and integrating online technology in classrooms. The main research question was:

1. How could social media be used as an educational tool to reform the Saudi education system?

In the early development of my research, the above research question was re-adjusted considering the following points. These points helped in addressing key issues in relation to education and digital media, identifying key differences between two

different environments, and eventually developing the current research question, as explained below:

- During the first year of this research, criticism of an existing project Tatweer (Tatweer Company for Educational Services, 2006) was highlighted in the Saudi media (McEvers, 2009)

The main objective was similar to the objective of my original proposal. The project aimed to reform education through the integration of digital media and technology. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, the existence of this project in reality triggered many shifting points in relation to the above research question.

Hence, in order to investigate how education could be reformed, it was more feasible to stay away from integrating a less controlled environment (social media) inside a controlled environment (Saudi schools). Therefore, the aim shifted from studying the possibilities of using social media as an educational tool, within the school system, into a virtual platform that could act independently to challenge what is already being taught in the school (the controlled environment). In doing so, "Twitter" was chosen for the aforementioned rational.

- Redirecting the focus of this research on gender.

Female gender was not initially the focus of this research. My interest was on "individuality" in both genders. My concern was to reform education through digital media. I was interested in understanding the challenges of such reform on the development of the Saudi individual, regardless of gender reference. However, during

the second year, the research shifted dramatically towards 'gendered identity', and I became extremely fascinated in achieving the research objectives with particular attention to gender. This is explained further in Chapter 3.

In addition, the literature review revealed that education, and in particular, religious curriculum is significant in shaping female individuality. As explained in Chapter 2, women play significant roles in Saudi Arabia. The literature review revealed the importance of Saudi women, right from the establishment of Saudi Arabia to the contemporary times. Thus, it has become crucial to highlight the female gender in this thesis.

- Focusing on the development of individuality

This thesis has been inspired by mind mapping and a review of many theories on human development in relation to education and social media, how the mind develops, and how developmental theories can enhance the analysis of this research. Thus, the approach taken to human development in this thesis is focused on the development of individuality from a gender perspective, as explained in Chapter 3.

In order to identify the influence of Twitter on female individuality, it was necessary to first begin by addressing the long-established definition of individuality and understanding how is an identity established through the curriculum. An answer to such question did not exist in the literature. There was a huge gap in studying individuality as defined in this research. Hence, the main research question of this thesis:

> Are long-established definitions of Saudi female individuality influenced by the rise of new social media, such as Twitter? If so, how?

1.7 Research Questions

This research explores the influence of Twitter on the development of individualism among young Saudi women, who received their high school education in Saudi Arabia. It focuses on understanding the experience of the Saudi women in traditional schools and on the social platform of Twitter. The research questions that this thesis aims to answer are expressed below.

Main question:

Are long-established definitions of Saudi female individuality influenced by the rise of new social media, such as Twitter? If so, how?

Secondary questions:

In order to find the answer to the above question, three secondary questions were raised. Literature on women's education and gender reform indicates that the difference in terms of gender based social restrictions is significant in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia educational reform is limited and the public sphere is restricted, therefore, the virtual environment could open a new window of possibilities.
Hence, the first question relates to the nature of environment:

1. Does the virtual environment of Twitter influence Saudi women's understanding of their own individuality, as taught previously through religious curricula in Saudi schools?

Literature on social networking in Saudi Arabia, demonstrates that the difference in the nature of information and communication between the two environments is powerful. The literature reveals that access to information is censored in Saudi Arabia

and sex-segregation is a key issue. Thus, the virtual environment could offer a dramatic change in terms of providing a higher level of communication and wider access to information. Therefore, the second question relates to the nature of information and communication:

2. Is it possible for the intensified nature of communication and information resulting from Twitter, to change or reform women's understanding of Islamic concepts taught in schools?

The dynamics of control between the political and religious authorities on Saudi women is strongly highlighted in the literature. The differences in the nature of environment, information and communication could eventually lead to a different dynamic of authorities between the virtual and the real world. Hence, the third question relates to authorities:

3. Do external authorities influence the development of self-authorship among Saudi women? Does the use of Twitter influence these traditional dynamics of authority? If so, how?

1.8 Research Design, Process and Methodology

In order to collect data in pursuit of answers to the above questions, data was obtained by adopting three methods - survey, observational analysis, and semi-structured interviews.

The thesis work began by designing the research and choosing the methodology, including the methods of data collection and analysis. The study involved selection of research philosophy, approach and strategy, followed by identification of the mixed

method research approach. As explained in Chapter 4, this research heavily depends on qualitative research, and quantitative research was only used as a departure point.

The survey was the first stage of the research; it was used as a quantitative method to gain an overall view of the levels of individuality among participants. This questionnaire was conducted among 100 females and 100 males. As the research progressed, gender started to become a key concept in this research. As the focus was altered to centre on studying female individuality, the data collected from male participants was ignored. The survey method was adopted to support the research and to guide the project during the fieldwork in the second and third stage.

In the second stage of research, observations were conducted in the Islamic studies classes, during lessons and outside classrooms, in a female school. The observational notes were also collected to augment the interview data with all participants. As explained in Chapter 4, the notes included daily behaviour of students and their interactions with their teachers. Also, observation notes from the school textbooks were found significant during the analysis. These observations can be seen to have had a crucial function in exploring the subject and leading to substantial findings.

Having established the recent situation of female individuality in education, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the third stage with twitter users, who had studied the same curriculum in Saudi schools. The interview questions were based on the analysis of the long-established concept of female individuality in accordance to the educational structure.

Chapter 4 provides a justification for the research design and methodology adopted in the study. This chapter also discusses the use of participant observation and interviews to collect the data required in answering the research questions. The use of

mixed methods is argued to help increase the credibility of the findings. The research design thus considers the complexity of the subject to help answering the research questions, which were based on; the nature of environment, the flow of information and communication; and the dynamics of authorities.

1.9 Thesis Outline

The thesis comprises of two main parts, which are divided into two sections and ten chapters. Section I includes four chapters, beginning with the present Introduction. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature. First, it illustrates the historical creation of the relation between politics and religion in Saudi Arabia, providing the application of a contextualized timeline to the areas of the current research. This timeline is divided into two periods: before and after the events of 9/11. Second, the thesis studies the existing literature in order to provide a general overview of the treatment of women's education in relation to Islam as an abstract religion, and Islam within a Saudi frame. This is followed by a review of the existing literature on the Saudi religious curriculum in addition to current reform projects on gender and education. As this research is interdisciplinary, the last part of Chapter 2 is devoted to a review of the literature on social networking platforms, focusing on the characteristics of Twitter and its current usage in the Arab world.

Chapter 3 develops the concept of individualism as a departure point for this framework, defined as the right of freethinking and the freedom of actions for the individual over the collectives. The concept of gendered identity is the central concept of this chapter. This central concept is positioned within two fields; feminist approaches to "gender", and psychological approaches to "identity". These

approaches discuss the theories of Islamic feminism and self-authorship in order to provide an accurate and up-to-date theoretical framework to shape the methodology.

Chapter 4 presents the research methodology and fieldwork approaches. Data was obtained using three methods: observational analysis, semi-structured interviews, and survey questionnaires. This chapter includes details about the rationale behind each method, actual process of each methodology, and outlines the research design, in addition to presenting the ethical issues of the research.

Section II of the thesis is divided into the six following chapters.

Chapter 5 presents a general overview of the school environment and its religious curriculum. It responds to the task of providing a context for the religious curriculum used in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it investigates the attempts at educational reform made by the government as a result of the events of 9/11. To that end, it presents a thorough study of Saudi textbooks before and after those events.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 focus on the formation of Saudi female individuality, respectively, they analyse three key concepts: identity, perceptions, and authorities. Chapter 6 is devoted to the analysis of the way in which environment, communication, information, and authorities in the physical world, influence Saudi women educated in Saudi schools. These key concepts merge to build Saudi women's identities, which are the basis for the analysis of religious perceptions in chapter 7. Chapter 7 demonstrates, within the Saudi educational system, the impact of information on development of Saudi women's individuality, which in turn leads to

the teaching of certain religious concepts along specific interpretative lines. These are namely dictated by the traditional Wahhabi school of thought, which is uncovered and developed in chapter 5. Finally, chapter 8 attempts to identify the dynamics between Saudi students' own sense of authorship and the influence of external authorities, expressed through the framework of Saudi society and the educational system.

Chapter 9 is devoted to an analysis of the effect of Twitter on female individuality in Saudi Arabia, specifically with relation to the themes outlined in chapters 6, 7, and 8. Chapter 9 seeks to answer the research questions by looking at the same religious perceptions as developed in the school environment, followed by comparing and contrasting diverse views to highlight the specific impact of Twitter. It will also emphasise the way in which Twitter acts to bring about these alterations.

In closing, chapter 10 provides a general discussion of the themes and findings presented in chapters 5 to 8, and correspond to the conclusion of the study. It will explore the limitations of the current study, and offer suggestions regarding areas for further investigation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

> "Literature adds to reality; it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become."
>
> - C.S. Lewis (Holmer, 1976 p.75)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will assess the current literature on two cornerstones of the research, which are female identity and the social impact of Twitter in Saudi Arabia. Thereafter, this part of the thesis aims to provide an intersectional approach to treat the subject at hand, as gendered identity is a result of a multitude of social, religious and political factors that act together, although sometimes unwillingly.

The literature review begins with an overview of the context in which the educational environment, as observed in the research, came to be. More specifically, first step is to analyse the rich literature on the history of Saudi Arabia, in order to capture the essence of the relationship between religious and political authorities as a direct factor in the definition of school curricula, therefore also a direct influence on Saudi women. The focus of this thesis, again, is not merely female Muslims, but *Saudi* female Muslims. As such, it is essential that light should be thrown on the uniqueness of the Saudi situation before moving on to the next part, which examines female individuality in this previously-defined socio-religious and political context.

The first challenge that the present study had to face relates to the fundamental materials, and effectively, the building-blocks, of the Islamic character of the Saudi woman. Female identity and the ingredients of individual development are extremely difficult to describe, let alone quantify. As such, an approach is proposed, which begins with the historical background mentioned in the previous paragraph, outlining the traditional balance of powers from a women's history perspective, in order to place Saudi women in their politico-religious contexts. Specifically, the study places them at the heart of politico-religious debates, measures and reforms, before moving on to finding their place and representation in the educational environment. By doing so, the thesis attempts to convey a sense of the politico-religious atmosphere in Saudi Arabia both before and after the reform, in order to better understand the environment in which Saudi women are traditionally brought up. The literature review has been structured to create an original flow so as to maintain clarity while tackling a very complex and sophisticated subject.

The second part of the study looks at the characteristics of social media as new building materials for the individuality of Saudi women. At present there are no studies examining both social media and Saudi women together from a feminist and psychological lens at the same time, which is the aim of this thesis. Hence, this section begins with the literature review of the Saudi religious curricula, before assessing the characteristics of Social media from an interdisciplinary research perspective.

In the absence of substantial literature that relates directly to the topic of Saudi education, Twitter and female individuality, it was decided, instead of examining the bulk of it at once, to review the literature from various disciplines relating to certain

key elements of my research separately. In this regard, I have also attempted to specify as much literature that highlights the uniqueness to the nation of Saudi Arabia as possible. However, it must be noted that besides certain recent studies conducted in Saudi Arabia on related topics, such as social media and journalism (Almaglouth, 2013), e-education from a technological point of view (Al-Alma'i, 2009) and even Twitter and social progress in a long-awaited, 2014 study by Irfan Chaudhry (Chaudhry, 2014), the scarcity of studies relating to women, Twitter in specific and Saudi Arabia is somewhat surprising.

Nevertheless, one very positive factor that helped facilitate this review was the existence of related theories discussed in different studies, such as identity and feminism, theories on the age of information in education and social media, and globalization as a theoretical framework for many studies in the new media. Hence, these acted as effective connectors in creating an academic network in which this research will not be marginalized.

Therefore, this chapter is divided into three analytical themes, which are the history of the politico-religious powers in Saudi Arabia as seen through a feminist lens, followed by women's education in Saudi Arabia including issues related to the public spheres, and finally, the characteristics of social media focusing on Twitter and, as far as possible, Saudi Arabia.

2.2 Placing Women in the Politico-religious History of Saudi Arabia

This section explores some aspects of the historical creation of the close relationship between politics and religion in Saudi Arabia and aims to provide a context in which to understand and trace, in particular, the recent changes in the characteristics of this symbiotic relationship. The focus is to present the Saudi historical narrative in two distinct periods. The events of September 11, 2001, marked an unquestionable break in the dynamics between politics and religion in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it has led to major transformations with multiple repercussions in many various fields, including education. In particular, the status of Saudi women has been influenced by 9/11 greatly, as the event brought new pressures on the Saudi government to reflect on its nature and goals.

Before moving on to the second part of historical study, this section begins by building an image of Saudi Arabia as a state with Wahhabism as one of its foundational blocks. From the definition of the Saudi state onwards, two important phases that changed the face of Saudi Arabia are outlined. The first element is the alliance between political and religious powers that founded the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The second phase, more recent, was brought about by the events of 9/11. It is worth mentioning here that the timeline chosen for this historical study is not a comprehensive chronology of the history of Saudi Arabia, which is largely beyond the scope of this thesis. The decision to work with a customized timeline stems from the need to provide a specific context for this research. It is essential that this timeline draws special attention to human development in particular, and more specifically to the development of the Saudi woman during the two phases mentioned below. Hence,

some historical arguments have been excluded in order to ensure the clarity and relevance of the study at the heart of the next few paragraphs.

2.2.1 Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism: In Search of a Definition

> "But Saudi Arabia is surprising in a lot of ways. Like any place, or any people, it relentlessly defies easy categorization."
>
> Dave Eggers (Elliott, 2012)

The history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is marked by various sets of political, economic, social and religious transformations. From the day of its foundation to its recent digital age, in which a "tweet" from a Saudi woman can be heard all over the world, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has seen myriad periods of development and modernization, experienced a great deal of reforms and policies, and chosen a political and social system that explains its survival and success to this day.

Nowadays, the name of Saudi Arabia evokes, in the majority of Western minds, images of desert, women covered with the "Abaya"[2], and a country with a seemingly limitless supply of oil, which is the defining resource behind the country's economic success. Simultaneously, the name conveys images of two holy mosques that define the kingdom's religious power; in fact, Saudi Arabia is one of the most publicly religious nations in the world (Ochsenwald, 1981). The relation between the religion of Islam and Saudi politics has been at the heart of countless books and research

[2] Abaya: A lose black fabric that covers the whole body except the face, feet, and hands with the option of wearing the "Niqab: face veil"

papers (Nevo, 1998). To summarize the unchanging view of many analysts, Saudi Arabia is the West's source of oil, and also the origin of the Wahhabi school of thought. Saudi Arabia's political system and social fabric are usually seen as born of the intertwinement of power of political economy and a robust religious ideology. One key issue, however, that has only been superficially discussed by observers as the existence of a certain link, is the nature, characteristics and strengths of the politico-religious bond in Saudi Arabia. This is a grey area of academia, where fieldwork research is not open to everyone's observation (Hayke, Hegghmmer and Lacroix, 2015). Hence, the influence of the Islamic religion on the political framework in Saudi Arabia has been always observed in terms of two general themes, which are either purely religious from a theological perspective, or purely temporal (Kechichian, 1986). Yet there are nonetheless a respectful number of scholars who have succeeded in presenting a fair understanding of the real image of Saudi Arabia. Such as Lacy (2009) and Lacroix (2005).

Due to the limited access to certain pieces of information necessary to build a fuller, more comprehensive image of the nature of political power in Saudi Arabia, there have been few unavoidably biased works, whose scope was diminished by focusing on a particular group in Saudi Arabia. Namely Matthiesen, in his recent research, investigated the Wahhabi school of thought in terms of its relation with the royal family, focusing only on its conflict with *Shi'ism*[3], (calling them "the other Saudi"), without providing a helpful context, or a wider picture of the conflictual relationship in broader terms (Matthiesen, 2015).

[3]*Shi'ism* : One of the politicized religious groups, with its own agenda.

Since scholars find great diversity in defining exactly what the nature of Saudi state authority entails, let us explore the very basis of the Saudi state. Saudi Arabia defines itself as a state that rules within the Islamic Law from the Qur'an and Sunna. The first article of its general principle states:

> Article 1: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God's Book, The Holy Qur'an, and the Sunna (Traditions) of the Prophet (PBUH)[4]. Arabic is the language of the Kingdom. The City of Riyadh is the capital.

(Saudi Embassy, 1992)

There is therefore no doubt that the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Arabic and Islamic state, with a national identity built almost exclusively around its religious component. What the above definition does not state, however, is that Saudi Arabia has always been linked in most of its official literature and documents with the Wahhabi/Salafi version of Sunna.

Wahhabism is an ideology based on Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab's thoughts; he began his public role in the 1740s. Wahhabis prefer to label themselves as "Salafis" or "Muwahhids". Salafi is a person who follows the value of the early Muslim clerics and Muwahid is a person who believes in God's unity (Commins, 2006). Their defining aim is given in a call to return from the age of ignorance to the principles of "Alsalaf alsalih" (Niblock, 2006). In most of the western literature, Wahhabism is defined as a politico-religious teaching that originated in the eighteenth century

[4] (PBUH): Peace be upon him. (A conventionally phrase attached to the name of prophet Muhammad)

(Vassiliev, 2000). This is the most appropriate definition within the context of this research, which recognizes not only the Islamic religion, but also, notably, Wahhabism as the core ideology and building block of the Saudi state. In order to explore this complex relationship between politics and religion, as well as Wahhabism as an essential element in Saudi leadership, identity and social life, the following paragraphs are divided into two periods. The one pre-dating 9/11, majorly about the foundation of Saudi Arabia which set the tone for a continuous status quo until 9/11, and other being the period after 9/11, characterized by what is commonly seen today as the Age of King Abdullah. The following timeline gives more details about these periods.

Pre-9/11 – The Foundation of Saudi Arabia	**Post 9/11 – The Age of King Abdullah**
1902s -1932	2001- 2015

Table 1: Contextualised Historical Timeline

The timeline is divided into two phases reflecting the discontinuity in Saudi Arabian history. The first phase is the foundation of the relationship between the religious authority and the royal family. The second phase, referred in this study as the "post 9/11" phase, is characterized by a shift from national privacy with regards to Saudi Arabia's own domestic affairs before the events of 9/11, to global exposure and global media pressure as a result of 9/11.

2.2.2 Pre-9/11 Religion and Politics: Two Sides of the Same Coin

When one thinks of the foundation of the Saudi Arabian state in 1932, two names come immediately to mind. One of them is Muhammad ibn Saud, the ruler of Al-Dir'iyya, a small town near the current capital Al Riyadh (Lacy, 2009); and the second name is that of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, the founder of "Wahhabism". "Wahhabism" is a fundamentalist Islamic reform movement based on a specific interpretation of the Islamic texts. Saudi Arabia was born of the close relationship between these two men.

The alliance between Al Saud and Abdul Wahhab began with a woman as its deepest origins. When he was in Al Uyayna, in the early thirties, local chiefs and rulers would tolerate Abdul Wahhab as long as he did not violate their political authority. However, the latter became instrumental in triggering his own expulsion when he insisted "to stone a woman" who confessed to having committed adultery. In spite of his family's opposition, Abdul Wahhab was a staunch believer in the need for a painful execution. This town's leadership, however, did not support Abdul Wahhab's views and his misguided belief in his own authority to dictate right and wrong and in his own ability to suggest rightful sanctions, hence his insistence resulted in his expulsion (Al-Rasheed, 2013). As a result, Abdul Wahhab realized that his moral authority was limited by his exposure on a political level, and if he were to make his ideology a powerful one, it was essential that he find a political patron to protect him. Thus, he established contact with the rulers of the eastern part of the peninsula, especially Al-Dir'iyya (before the creation of the Saudi Kingdom), and took up residence among them until he persuaded them to support his ideas and to help propagate his cause. In turn, local rulers used his religiosity a mean for strengthening

their rule and expanding it over the Bedouins and the desert trips. Those Bedouin peoples thus, came to serve in a volunteer army for the Al-Dir'iyya rulers, convinced that whoever does not believe in what Muhammad b. Abdul Wahhab preached could only be an unbeliever, therefore committing the sin of Shirk[5]. As a result, their blood may legitimately be shed and their property may be plundered (Daḥlān and Kīlānī, 2015). The symbiotic alliance was based on two commitments. First of all, Ibn Saud must protect Abdul Wahhab's claim in purifying Islam and therefore assist him in the propagation of his religion mission. In return, Abdul Wahhab would influence the people to support Ibn Saud's political mission (Lacy, 2009).

Even though the empire that the two Muhammads built did not last (Lacy, 2009), the alliance remained strong until the rise of Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, the great-great-great grandson of Mohammad ibn Saud (Al-Rasheed, 2013). In around 1902, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud returned to Riyadh from exile in Kuwait to restore the vanished Saudi state. In the brief space of sixteen years, the Saudi state was constructed and King Abdul-Aziz became the formal leader of most of the Arabian Peninsula in 1932. Simultaneously, he also became the head of Wahhabism (Troeller, 2013), thereby restoring a unified religious nation under the slogan of Wahhabi Islam (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Since then, the foundations of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia have relied on two pillars of the ruling of AL Saud and the influence of the Salafist. "The alliance established between the Ibn Saud and Ibn Abdul Wahhab "gave birth to the division of labour between the political authority and the religious authority" (Mouline, 2015, p.48).

[5] Shirk: the sin of practicing idolatry or polytheism.

Furthermore, these two pillars also led to a definition of Saudi nationalism (Bligh, 1985). Therefore, up until 2001, an exploration of Saudi identity would have primarily pointed to the symbiotic influence of Wahhabism and the political authority of Al Saud.

Yet despite the fact that Abdul Wahhab had strong power in controlling different tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, he was not free of criticism. Some of his earliest critics were in fact his own brother, Shaikh Suleiman, and his teachers. Furthermore, he faced strict opposition to his ideology from his father and teachers who did not agree with his ideas as he, demonstrably, did not base them on earlier interpretations of the Islamic text (Haroon, 2014). An extract of a text from Shaikh Tantawi, a well respected Egyptian Shaikh in the Muslim world, confirms the strong opposition of Abdul Wahhab's own family: "his father and all others turned against him. Shaikh's father Abdul Wahhab used to advice his son not to disrespect the religious monuments, but he did not listen to the advice and instead decided to carry on with his ways." (Haroon, 2014, p.28) Despite the strong rejection met by his religious views, he claimed that the aim of the sect born of his ideologies existed to purify "Tawheed" – worshipping God in exclusivity – and to free it from all trace of "Shirk" – being an unbeliever. The latter was the state of mind attributed by Abdul Wahhab to the people living on the Saudi Arabian territory for six hundred years. As a result, and arguably a matter of necessity, Wahhabism gave itself the holy mission of renewing this people's religion for them, in a Rousseauian attempt to "force" a lost people "to be free", albeit in this case, it was in a religious context.

Therefore, this original alliance in the first Saudi state created a very special relationship between the Wahhabis and the royal family. Later on, the dynamics of power in the Kingdom from its first state to recent years have been shaped by this alliance, as both players contributed immensely to the unification of the kingdom into a single, forward-looking nation. On one hand, Al Saud exercised his ruling influence on the people and created a political framework in which to ensure the survival of the state. And on the other hand, Abdul Wahhab used his religious influence on people's beliefs and behaviours to instil religious faith and create a national identity strongly based on a religious component. Such complex dynamics provided the crucial factors underpinning Saudi Arabia's national policy and global influence (Niblock, 2004). Beyond their practical impact on the unification of the Saudi state and nation, these particular dynamics have also been fundamental drivers behind the shaping of a distinctive Saudi identity. This situation, as shown in the next section, prevailed in the exclusive, closed and private sphere of Saudi domestic politics until the events of 9/11, which drew tremendous international attention to Saudi Arabian national politics and its manifestations in policy-making for the social and public spheres.

2.2.3 Post-9/11 Religion and Politics: Two Different Coins

On September 11th, 2001, four consecutive terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre, in New York led to over 2,500 fatalities and left over 6,000 injured. The international claims are that out of the nineteen aircraft hijackers, fifteen of them were from Saudi Arabia (Doumato, 2003). The tragic attack on one of the most imposing and famous landmarks of American culture and influence, has had a tremendous impact on Saudi Arabia. Namely, it has shifted the attention of the international community on the dynamics and the inner workings of Saudi Arabia's

economy, religion and politics. An analysis of 9/11, partly funded by Saudi organizations, has come to the conclusion that the global radical group Al-Qaeda was involved in the crime (Commins, 2006). As a result, Saudi Arabia was seen under a new light on the global stage.

Criticism of Wahhabism has gained unprecedented momentum in Saudi Arabia in recent years, both from the international community and, limitedly so, from within. Consequently, the Saudi government has partly subscribed to certain critical opinions and has taken a number of steps towards social and religious reforms accordingly (Lacroix, 2005). Therefore, Saudi Arabia's new reputation, along with governmental steps aimed at changing the nature of the old romantic alliance between politics and religion, flipped the equation of powers between both authorities. This resulted in differentiation in the visions once shared by the political and the religious authorities and each player's strategy became disharmonious regarding the others. The events of September 11 resulted in the creation of a global perception that the roots of terrorism come from the Wahhabi school of thought, which is based in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, nowadays, there exists a strong global debate in the media demanding curriculum reform in Saudi schools, due to their strong Wahhabi component which has been targeted as the deeper roots of extremism (Doumato, 2003). In addition, there is a global awareness about the symbiosis between the Wahhabi school of thought and the public policy of the kingdom, through the former's entanglement with the domestic political sphere. Therefore, the global community has been inclined to link the identity of the Kingdom with terrorism. As a result, there have been attacks on the Kingdom's policy on many other issues, as the foreign media deduced from

this relationship that peace and harmony in every other aspect of society must be, sooner or later, jeopardized by this interplay of politics and religion.

Along the lines of the previous reasoning, the political authority's new strategy has two main objectives. First of all, the separation between the political and the religious authorities without losing the Islamic identity, as well as the value of Saudi identity, which is, as argued previously, a historically religious entity. The separation of powers has not been a key element of the international debate, as this is not a process unique to Saudi Arabia, and has indeed happened multiple times in history for various states. Also, a separation of power does not include the taking over of control over educational and social institutions from the religious authorities – at least not entirely. In fact, the second objective is to limit the religious authorities internally and to replace their role of middleman with a direct dialogue between the political authority and society, a dialogue that could support the new strategies of the political authority to ensure the survival and success of the Saudi nation. This manifests itself in all aspects of the social discourse, of which the question of the Saudi woman, as the central theme of this research, plays a significant part, as argued below.

From the early days of Saudi state-formation, the Saudi women have been the main theme for any conflict between the political and the religious authorities in Saudi Arabia. Generally speaking, Saudi kings have been striving to improve the condition for women in Saudi Arabia. Their attempts range from (1932-1953) King Abdul-Aziz's famous slogan, "And I'm the Brother of Nora" as he pushed for feminist measures by appealing to men's affiliation with women through their kinship and marriage, to King Faisal's founding of the kingdom's very first school for girls in

1957 (developed further in the next section), to the latest initiatives of King Abdullah's project towards women empowerment (2006-2015). In fact, so far, the Saudi government has been in harmony with the international community in regards to gender reform. Many relatively bold decisions and projects focusing on procuring civil defence and rights for women have emphasised a great decline in religious-conservative influence and are optimistic and promising first steps tending towards further transformations within the social structure of the Saudi society (Doumato, 1992).

King Abdullah, initiated a direct dialogue with the society at a national level, which has been interpreted by a couple of analysts as a means to replace the Wahhabi scholars. For instance, the first national dialogue conference in 2003 was one of the highlights towards religious reform against the Wahhabis and their disproportionate influence. In fact, none of the official Wahhabi leaders were invited to the conference, clearly reflecting the new marginalizing strategy conducted by the Saudi government towards the historically-powerful religious authority (Lacroix, 2005). More specifically, in light of this research, King Abdullah re-defined his image through his support of women and women's rights, by creating a new strong socio-political alliance based on the theme of women's empowerment. This new socio-political alliance was reflected through his bold gender reform projects. Indeed, this was not in favour of the Wahhabi religious authority, which had been the main source of support of the anti-feminist sphere since its foundation. This influence is further explained in the following section.

2.2.4 The 'Woman Debate': A Central Theme for Reform

The Saudi 'woman debate' has been under the authority of religious scholars since the 1970s. This is especially true in the field of education. Historically in Saudi Arabia, there has always been a sense of fear towards the power of women, and given the special relationship between the two authorities, this fear was transferred from a religious context to the political authority and further affected domestic policies. As a result, the state marginalized women in the public sphere and limited their role in many social institutions, instead diverting their attention to activities related to charity institutions, housewifery and education (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Women were marginalized in the public sphere, and restricted to areas where they would not challenge any of the religious or political authorities. Additionally, sex segregation between the two genders was heavily implemented in the social structure of Saudi Arabia, especially in education (Baki, 2004).

Unsurprisingly, the 'woman debate' became a key argument in Saudi Arabia, as it was the social area in which the religious authority had the most coercive power. Based on that, the new strategy of the Saudi state challenged the religious authority on the 'woman debate'. After 9/11 and given the external pressures on Saudi Arabia for reform, the Saudi woman has become the focus of a modernization and rebranding process for Saudi Arabia, so much so that, the modern Saudi Women became the new face for Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2013). In the post 9/11 period, the political authority redirected its policy towards women expressing a degree of resistance to the religious authority, while still committed to its Wahhabi foundations. The state currently supports gender reform, introducing greater political, social and economical participation, marginalizing religious scholars whose 'fatwas' do not reflect these

current reform (Al-Rasheed, 2013). The struggle to find a correct and effective balance between traditions and the pursuit of modernity in Saudi Arabia began with the start of the oil production in 1979 (Hamdan, 2005). Simultaneously, this struggle has mainly been focused on women's position in the public sphere, and the pursuit of women's right, such as driving and wearing the veil. As a result of 9/11, there has been an intensification of the debates around these topics, bringing them effectively to the forefront of global discussions. Some of these, relevant to the themes of this research, are developed below as they relate to women's education.

2.3 Women's education in Saudi Arabia

This section reviews women's education in an Islamic context, specific to Saudi Arabia. While it is tempting to see women's education solely from a religious perspective, it is important to differentiate the Islamic vision for women's education from the state's policy and institutions. The latter has been highly controversial in the Arab world in the past few decades, hence the need to single out the Saudi situation in specific. Additionally, this section focuses further on a review of the Saudi religious curriculum and the few studies related to the context of this research.

2.3.1 Women's education in Islam

The Islamic religion, some western scholars argue, is responsible for the marginalisation of women in the public sphere of Saudi Arabia (Altorki, 1986). A global concern to study Islamic education in the Middle East, and in Saudi Arabia in specific, was seen as fallout of the events of 9/11. In 2006, over nine studies were focused solely on the question of the Islamic education in different Muslim countries,

such as Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. However, two issues arose in relation to the context of this research, which were that these studies only set the beginning of a trend, and thus covered different areas of the Islamic world, sometimes including non-Arabic countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Indonesia, which fall beyond the scope of this research (Kadi, 2006). Moreover, several studies were conducted on the Islamic education in Saudi Arabia. Yet they failed to define and develop on the issue of the development of the Saudi woman within this Islamic educational sphere. On the other hand, many PhD thesis conducted by Saudi students remain unknown, without any intention to publish them, mainly because of the politically sensitive topics that they bring forth. In the context of this research, I succeeded in finding a recent PhD thesis awarded by a UK university, which was conducted in a Saudi school by a Saudi researcher examining the religious curriculum from its teaching aspects. However, this thesis has never been published and permission from the author to reference her work was denied, again, due to the high level of sensitivity around this topic in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in section II, I shall conduct my own study of the Islamic educational system and teachings as an introductory context to research analysis.

To begin an examination of Islamic curriculum, I first refer to the very basis of the Islamic religion, given in the Qur'an and the Hadeeths – the prophet's sayings. The Islamic concept of education originated from the first word in the history of Islam "Iqra", meaning "to read". The verb "iqra" was the first command given by God in the first instance of divine revelation (Qur'an, n.d. p. 96:1). Bagheri and Khosravi (2006) suggested in deeply-enlightening research on this concept of education within Islam that it includes three basic elements, which are knowledge, choice, and action.

According to the Islamic texts, these elements are closely linked as means to acquire wisdom (Bagheri & Khosravi, 2006). Sifa Mtango (2004) famously affirmed that the source of oppression towards women in Saudi Arabia, in terms of women's rights, according to a Human Rights Watch report (Perpetual Minors, 2008), was not religion *per se*, but the intertwinement of political power with the specific Wahhabi reading of the Islamic texts: "Women in Saudi Arabia can be seen to be in a position subservient to men as restrictions are strictly applied" (Perpetual Minors, 2008).

Therefore, the Qur'an, taken in its original form, explicitly incites believers to seek knowledge and agency through education. The expression "to read" translates into a form of personal choice to seek education. Moreover, the need for "action" denotes the necessity of adopting an active stance towards learning, and to turn one's innate curiosity into a drive for knowledge. This idea was explicated in one of the prophets' sayings, "seek knowledge even in China", meaning that one should search for knowledge even if it is as far away as China. Another prophet's saying reflecting the importance of knowledge is given in the following passage, "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave". Interestingly, these sayings, in their original context, applied equally to both genders. In fact, the original texts did not make education and the pursuit of knowledge an elitist activity exclusive to the male gender. In fact, a study on the character of Aisha (RA), the Prophet's wife found that the general atmosphere during the Prophet's time was concentrated on sharpening mental energies (Muhsin, 2013). The study also proposed the Prophet's encouragements and support to prepare women as experts in "fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence", through the character of Aisha (RA) as a model teacher (Muhsin, 2013).

The first concept of an educational institution was formulated in a teaching environment called "Kuttab", ran by "Mu'allim", meaning "teacher" (Kadi, 2006). The concept of "Kuttab" is dated back to the Prophet's time, and closely linked to his wife Aisha. She played an essential role in teaching various topics, such as medicine and inheritance, in addition to narrating more than 2000 "hadeeths -The Prophet's sayings", after the prophet's death (Bukhārī and Khan, 1997). Not only did she have the right to teach a new generation of believers, the basis of Islamic morality, she was also a preacher of hadeeths on human and moral development, such as the one on the stages of moral development: "There are three (persons) whose actions are not recorded - a sleeper till he awakes, an idiot till he is restored to reason, and a boy till he reaches puberty" (Beekun, 1997, p.5). Aisha's role cannot be underestimated in being responsible for the moral education of Islamic believers after the Prophet's death; she was given complete agency to guide a new generation of Muslim believers, which testifies to an inherent religious trust in women's capacity for intellectual tasks, as well as integrity. Moreover, Aisha is only one example of a woman, who had a leading role in contributing to the intellectual and the political development of the Islamic culture. What is worth mentioning in the context of this research is that she was not only a teacher to young children – her students included many male adults such as *Ata bin Abî Rebāh* who have quoted "Aisha was one of the members of the Ummah with the best knowledge of religious law and who held the very soundest opinions" (Yahya, 2015). Furthermore, Umar bin Alkhattab, a great Muslim Khalifa, *i.e.* ruler, used to seek her consultation on social and legal issues (Yahya, 2015).

The concept of "Kuttab" has had tremendous influence on the history of Islamic education in the Middle East, and even more so in Saudi Arabia. There have always

been a significant number of women committed to the prophet's encouragement to seek knowledge. Before the first school for girls was founded in the 1960s, women who wished to learn to read and write in addition to learning religious values went to "Kuttab", which was their source of learning. However, historically, Saudi "Kuttab" were always gender-segregated, and women had to be taught separately from men, by a female teacher. In 1963, Effat, King Faisal's wife, founded the first school for girls, "Dar Al-Hanan", in the city of Jeddah. This further legitimized and denoted the government's commitment to female rights and women's position in society – albeit still marginalized, they were given, in effect, the right to an institutionalized education under the same state authority as men, which was a huge improvement from the dispersed and officious "Kuttab". The following paragraphs examine, in detail, what the newly-founded school for girls meant in social and practical terms.

2.3.2 Women's Education: in Saudi Arabia

In the early days following the opening of Dar Al-Hanan in Jeddah (Hamdan, 2005), school textbooks and teachers were imported from other Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. Students were taught music, physical education, English and religious education including all Islamic school of thoughts (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Following Dar Al-Hanan's footsteps, the state started opening girls' schools in different cities around the Kingdom. However, this policy was met with a lot of criticism and proved to be a difficult task. Formal female education was faced with strong opposition from the religious authorities. In fact, the first school in Jeddah was protected, under the command of King Faisal, with armed troops to deter the followers of the Wahhabi authorities from committing any crimes (Lacy, 2009). Many people were ideologically against providing education for their daughters or sisters

due to their belief in Abdul Wahhab's principles, as expressed by the Wahhabi authorities. Regardless of this rejection, the state continued to open girl's schools in different cities, but only 2% of Saudi girls were enrolled (Ministry of Education; Al-Rasheed, 2013). Lacy, in his latest book on Saudi history (2009), interviewed one of the Saudi key leaders behind the drive for female education, Dr. Alobaid, who was educated in the United States with a qualification to supervise modern curriculum reform. Lacy recorded, "he recalled supervising one school where there were only two pupils in an entire year – the granddaughters of the headmaster and the school caretaker... then suddenly", he remembers, "Everyone wanted to get their girls educated." (p.240).

This sudden desire from the people provoked a persistent conflict between Salafī (*i.e.* Wahhabi) scholars and the political actors designing policies aimed at providing continued education for women. Therefore, to preserve these girls' schools and to protect them from a strong religious stigma, King Faisal "surrendered girls' education to the supervision of the religious scholars" while keeping the schools running (Lacy, 2009). As a result, female education shifted to the Department of Religious Guidance, while the education of men was kept separate, in the Ministry of Education (Hamdan, 2005). This shift in the supervising authority resulted in a marked change in educational features, including school textbooks, which were, from then on, based on Abdul Wahhab's books. The situation also changed in practical terms, as education became more and more of a religious affair. For instance, girl schools' uniforms changed from short dresses to long blue skirts and long white shirts, in addition to the compulsory Veil and Abaya when leaving the school (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

As female education is a key theme of this research, the next section will examine the characteristics of the Saudi religious curriculum, especially with regards to intellectual development and gendered identity in the public sphere.

2.3.3 The Saudi Religious Curriculum.

Abou El-Fadl (2001) is one of the few published scholars who wrote about the specific issue of the religious authority in Saudi and its influence – particularly its restrictions – on women. The main tool used to exercise this influence is through women's education. The fundamental contribution of any educational system is undoubtedly on a human intellectual development level. As such, education's impact on an individual resonates deeply at a personal level, which constitutes the backbone of the individual's future social and professional lives. The majority of studies on women's education in Saudi Arabia agree that the main purpose of their education is to prepare them to become obedient wives and mothers, and to prepare them for a limited range of professional activities, which are deemed "fit" for their biological talents, such as nursing and teaching. Such a limitation contradicts the very definition and mission of education in the original Islamic teachings, where women could be – and were strongly encouraged to be – active professionals in the fields of politics, finance and such.

At first sight, analysing the impact of education in the Islamic environment of Saudi Arabia sounds simple as the religious curriculum has not been fundamentally reformed since the 1970s. In reality however, it is a complex task, as little is known about the learning process fostered by the religious authorities through education in

regards of the development of the Saudi woman specifically. In a general sense, little is known about the religious curriculum in Saudi schools.

Most of the study conducted after 9/11 is focused only on violence against non-Muslims as befits the priorities defined by the events of 9/11. One of such studies was conducted in 2003 by former Saudi Judge Sheikh Abd Al-'Aziz Al-Qassem and Saudi author and journalist Ibrahim Al-Sakran. They examined different subjects in the religious curriculum in Saudi Arabia in relation to terrorism, without any specific outlook on questions of the development of the individual (Wynbrandt, 2010). Perhaps the lack of resources in this area is due to the almost impossible mission of accessing information for most researchers, especially in the context of a qualitative research including an observational method.

Saudi schools emphasise two main religious ideas. One of them is the idea of "Tawheed"[6], which is heavily influenced by the teachings of Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahhab, notably in his book "Kitab at-Tawheed alladhi huwa haqq Allah ala'l-'Abeed" or "The book of monotheism that is God's right on [His] slaves" (Abdul-Wahhab, n.d.). Tawheed is the central pillar of the Islamic faith, and defines Islam as a monotheist religion of which the "chahada", manifestation of the Tawheed, is the first pillar. Central to any Islamic education, this concept has stirred some controversy on the international stage (Al-Saif, 2013). The very rare studies conducted in relation to women in the Islamic education system highlighted the Wahhabi prohibition of "Ekhtelat", which is defined as the mixing between genders. In other words, Wahhabi teachings in the Islamic curriculum promote the separation of men and women in the

[6]Tawheed: "the affirmation of God as One, Absolute, and Ultimate; it deeply affects all aspects of Islamic thought, expression and behavior" (Alfaruqi, 1986, p.169)

public sphere, with the result that women have their own exclusive public spaces in schools, universities, events, debates, organisations, restaurants, shopping centres and even in their work environment (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Some scholars, especially from outside the Saudi sphere of influence, emphasised the fact that Islam was never a religion that encouraged sex segregation. Abdullah Al Qasimi, a Saudi writer who moved to Al Azhar in Egypt for further religious studies, declared that "all worship involves mixing between men and women. Take the pilgrimage, the preaching, the prayers and war. They all involve men and women being together." (Al-Qasimi, 2007, p.70; Al-Rasheed, 2013). The Quraan and "hadeeths" – prophet's sayings – are full of instances where men and women 'mix' and 'interact' in various ways. As discussed earlier, Aisha was a great example for such interactions. However, given the special relationship that exists between the political and religious spheres in Saudi Arabia, as emphasised above, it is important to further examine the political authority's perspective on this religious curriculum. This is the concern of the next section.

2.4 King Abdullah and the Soft Layer of Reform

Soon after 9/11, in 2002, a tragic fire burned down a school for girls in Mecca where fifteen students died and over fifty students were injured (Lacy, 2009). An international organisation Human Rights Watch concluded, that the reason for this tragedy, was that the girls had not been wearing the Veil and Abaya at that time of the day, and the *Mutawa*[7] believed that it was inappropriate for the male rescuers to see them. Hence, they decided to interfere with the rescuing process, causing over ten

[7]Mutawa: The government-authorized religious police. A religious policewho enthusiatically enforce the Islamic codes of morality through the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (following the Wahhabi teaching).

innocent deaths. In fact, Mecca's Civil Defence Department made a public report read out in the Arab News (Jeddah), stating that the school authorities 'intentionally obstructed the efforts to evacuate the girls. This resulted in the increased number of fatalities. Furthermore, Civil Defence Officers denounced the active obstructions to the rescue mission: 'Whenever the girls got out through the main gate, these people forced them to return via another. Instead of extending a helping hand for the rescue work, they were using their hands to beat us.' (Human Rights Watch, 2002)

This tragedy was turned into an opportunity for the government to remove the religious power's control over women's education, in order to shift it back to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education is now responsible for overseeing both the education of boys and girls (female education had been excluded and under the authority of a religious institution until 2002). This is explained by the fact that the accident of 2002 was seen – and condemned – as a direct result of the strict Wahhabi teachings, provided as the main reason behind the *Mutawa's* behaviour during the rescue mission. Additionally, as a consequence of the 9/11, King Abdullah initiated huge projects towards educational reform at all levels, from elementary to higher education, all the way to research programs and facilities. Below is a brief outline of the main progressive, governmental projects highlighted in the literature and an overview of a few related studies. It is important to place them here in order to highlight the general trend and direction taken by the political authorities in Saudi Arabia regarding educational reform.

2.4.1 Nora University

Education in Saudi Arabia started with only two percent of Saudi women benefitting from it. Thanks to King Abdullah's recent projects on women's education, more than 60% of university students are female. In 2004, the University of Riyadh for Women was founded as the largest university in the world for women. Two years later, King Abdullah changed its name into Princess Nora University. It has been argued that changing the name of the university was an intended symbolic act to highlight the role of Saudi women, represented by Princess Nora, the sister of the founder King Abdul-Aziz (Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University, 2015). In my own view, Princess Nora acted as the true founder of the kingdom, making this rebranding a valuable token of recognition of all Saudi women. Moreover, in 2011 the new campus was inaugurated in an official ceremony by King Abdullah as part of the government's effort to emphasise their commitment to reform.

2.4.2 Al Fayez: The First Woman in a Ministerial Post.

Educational and gender reform in Saudi Arabia remain to be the main ongoing demands of human rights activists. As such, the two interlocking elements are at the heart of a new political strategy for rebranding the kingdom. Thus, the state stepped up its ongoing reforming projects and decisions. One prominent action was the appointment of Dr. Nora Al Fayez to take a leading role in the Ministry of Education. This appointment was announced in 2009, the same year as "Saudi Arabia made commitments on human rights issues during its Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council in June" (Almugaiteeb, 2010). In 2009, the Ministry of Education was chosen to be the first ministry to appoint a woman in a ministerial position

(Almugaiteeb, 2010). This ground-breaking appointment, in addition to the shift of female education back under the control of the Ministry of Education, are genuine state-led attempts to convince the international community that educational reform is the government's top priority. This also expresses itself in the marginalization of the religious authorities in the dynamics of power in the public sphere.

2.4.3 King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST)

The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) was established in September 2009 (Kaust, 2009). This new university is considered to be a key project both locally and globally.

Globally, the university's focus on the sciences and its adoption of a global vision of contributing scientific knowledge to the worldwide pursuit of progress has given the university a reputation as a leading destination for research, education and cultural exchange (Kaust, 2009). It has effectively helped to re-brand the image of King Abdullah, portraying him as a forward-thinking reformist who recognizes the value of scientific research and the importance of the global community. "The university is received as a powerful signal of his commitment in opening the kingdom politically, socially, and culturally – not just a university that aimed to compete with other leading global scientific institutions" (Haykel, Hegghmmer & Lacroix, 2015, p. 32)

> "The University shall be a beacon for peace, hope, and reconciliation and shall serve the people of the Kingdom and benefit all the peoples of the world."

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud (Kaust, 2009)

At a local level, one key strategy to limit the religious authorities was the one discussed in 2.2.4., which consisted in diminishing the role of the religious authorities as a necessary middleman between the political power and society. The inauguration of the university effectively symbolized the opening up of a new community and structure; a structure that challenges the values of long-established religious clerics. The new structure bypassed key socio-religious values dear to Wahhabism, such as sex segregation, and the previously-unquestionable Islamic dress code for women. While the existing structure, as argued previously under the prohibition of "Ekhtelat", had a particular attachment to sex segregation as one of four defining characteristics of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, the new KAUST University ignores this socio-religious obstacle in order to promote a new type of community (Abouammoh, Smith & Duwais, 2014).

Such bold measures towards the marginalization of the religious powers are parallel to the proposed new political strategy in Saudi Arabia. In fact, the break between the two powers became clear to the Saudi people when one Fatwa was tweeted from Shaikh Saad Al-Shithri, a senior Saudi cleric, criticizing the King's support of a mixed gender university. Following this Fatwa, King Abdullah removed him from a highly-prestigious council of religious scholars (Reuter, 2009). "Not only did King Abdullah hold his ground in the face of criticism, but he also sent a clear message that KAUST and his vision for both it and for Saudi society were indelibly tied to his personal political authority" (Haykel, Hegghmmer & Lacroix, 2015, p.31). This

development proves two points that need to be borne in mind for the rest of this thesis. Firstly, the government is staunchly implementing its program of re-branding through its new political strategy and secondly, the political authority's power reigns over the religious power.

In his article, Toby Jones (2015) argues that KAUST is an important expression of the techno-political power in Saudi Arabia. One could not agree more. As mentioned previously, when power was divided between the two founding pillars, the religious authority controlled the educational sphere, while the political authority controlled the economy and technology, including the media. "Technology and power have long been connected in Saudi Arabia" (Jones, 2015, p.33). Yet the question remains of whether, under the umbrella of educational reform through technology, the religious authority will stay in control of people's minds through religious values in the age of digital media? KAUST is a great symbol of the way in which technology could play a crucial role in reforming education and reforming the religious education in Saudi Arabia, with the support of the political authority.

2.4.4 King Abdullah International Scholarship Program

King Abdullah International Scholarship Program (KASP) is also a great manifestation of the government's reforming spirit. "KASP is believed to be the largest fully-funded government scholarship program that any nation has ever sponsored" (Bukhari and Denman 2013; Abouammoh, Smith & Duwais, 2014, p.44). The scholarship program's mission is "to prepare and qualify Saudi human resources in an effective manner so that they will be able to compete on an international level in the labour market and the different areas of scientific research, and thereby become an

important source of supply of highly qualified individuals for Saudi universities as well as the government and private sectors" (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, p.110). However, in light of the current global events, and the constant demand for educational reform, it is argued that KASP's core mission ranks as another bold project for educational and socio-religious reform at a local level, and serve the purpose of rebranding the Saudi nation on a global level. Hilal and Denmam, whose research interests included the students studying abroad under the KASP, concluded in their paper that KASP was a tool for peace within the Arab region, and between the Arab region and the western world, in addition to being a governmental tool to improve its global image (Hilal & Denman, 2013).

Hilal and Denman (2013) research emphasised the benefits of the KASP for Saudi students, enabling them to experience cultural exchanges, and offering them the opportunity to learn a second language and acquire skills with relation to economic development. However, none of the papers focused on the influence of KASP on the female gender, specifically on the opportunities it provided to Saudi women in particular. An important issue that is worth noting in light of this research is related to the status of the male guardian. "While the scholarship is awarded to both male and female Saudis, a female student must have a male guardian to travel with her. The guardian is required to stay with her through the completion of the scholarship program. Guardian expenses are covered by the program" (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, 112). In effect, this significantly limits the scope of individual agency for women on the program. Even so, the KASP has met a great deal of resistance.

Given the reception of KAUST, which fostered female higher education in a national environment, it is unsurprising that Saudi religious clerics supported education for

women outside the country even less. But again, the political authority disregarded such opposition. Yet in order to avoid domestic trouble, the program invented a diplomatic regulation for female to study abroad within the religious frame symbolized by the "male guardian". While the political power could assert its authority in regard of KAUST and ignore religious criticism, this time it could not get away with granting a KASP to female students while entirely disregarding the staunch religious resistance to it. Interestingly, the "male guardian" condition has not been strictly implemented at an administrative level. On an informal basis, it is possible for a Saudi woman to study abroad without a male guardian as long as the latter is present at the time when she opens her application at the beginning of her educational journey. Of course, no named cases have been provided in the literature for privacy and safety reasons, but there has been evidence that the clause has only been loosely implemented.

2.4.5 "Tatweer" Program

Among all of these promising projects on reforming education, only one major program, called the Tatweer program is directed towards school education, including the religious curriculum reform, instead of higher education.

Tatweer (which means "development") began in 2007 (Alyami, 2014). There is not sufficient evidence or literature on how the program benefited schools or the development of education in general as a result of Tatweer. Supposedly, because Tatweer was a local program aiming to target local schools and students, unlike KAUST and KASP which had an international component to them, access to data and research materials were highly restricted, not only for international researchers but

also for local ones. Also, such an investigation requires a specific method in order to gather accurate data, including an observational approach and face-to-face interviews with pupils. Most importantly, it requires access to the privacy of the chosen educational institutions, which, understandably, they are very reluctant to allow. Another reason is the lack of commitment or communication between the "Tatweer" team and external researchers, especially if the latter, are female. For example, none of the contact information on their website gave access to effective routes for investigation.

In one study about the program, Alyami (2014) a male researcher pointed that, "my plan was to interview three focus groups in three cities; however, upon arrival at the venue of the Tatweer Unit in Jeddah I found that the whole group was busy. Unfortunately, only one member of the group was willing to do the interview (p. 1427). Unsurprisingly, methodology is one of the major weaknesses in Alyami's study. He used a superficial method by interviewing teachers and principals and simultaneously marginalizing the students. Despite this major weakness, the study proved the Tatweer program's focus on the packaging rather than the delivery of actual product in an educational context. The author highlighted the new technological equipment and construction work in new buildings, putting them at the heart of the program. One positive feature was providing student with supervised access to the Internet, which allows for a wider access to information. Alyami, however, concluded with a cultural problem present in use of the internet: "There was a problem when the program began in 2007, the culture about Internet was different; there was a fear of using it as some parents did not have Internet at home. As a result, there was a rate of withdrawal of students (50 students out of 360 dropped out from the school) as parents refused the idea of giving their children access to a laptop and

Internet. This used to be one of the dilemmas related to the modernization of the school curricula, but now most of the students have a smart mobile" (p.1432). What the researcher fails to consider, however, is the exact way in which the reforms in the curriculum are expressed in the actual textbooks and the way in which the students are being taught – which is a major flaw when one decides not to interview any students in addition to the school and teaching staff.

There is, however, interesting data on the social media (Twitter) criticizing the Tatweer program and its team. These data act as indications of the gaps in this program. Most of them come in a visual form, such as the image below. They highlight the superficial changes within this program. They also indicate the existence of intense criticism coming from the Saudi population concerning the government's decision to invest immense amounts of resources in what was deemed "wrong places". One of the strongest online criticisms of the budget was expressed through the following caricature.

Figure 1 Caricature: (Old schools, and 41 million Saudi Riyal for a new logo for the ministry)

Source: "An7a" online newspaper (Al-Abdulla, 2012)

The above caricature emphasise the idea that the religious syllabi essentially remained untouched, which is discussed later on in chapter 5. As such, the year 1970 remains the latest update for the general policies and goals of the Ministry of Education (Alyami, 2014). In fact, while the program managed to remove paragraphs in relation to intolerance with regards to non-Muslims or such related concepts as "alwalaa wal baraa", it failed to change the general policies and goals of the educational system that had been prevailing since the 70s. In reality, this program did not bring a tangible and substantial reform as it failed to rethink the ideology instilled in the curriculum. Furthermore, the changes did not consider any issue regarding gender discrimination against women. Tatweer was purposed as a reforming program with a huge national budget and with a mission to fulfil one of the important aims addressed by King Abdullah, reform of religious curriculum. Did reform really happen? This question, which remained long unanswered by the related field of academic studies for reasons emphasised above, will be the opening chapter of the analysis section, in which a meticulous examination of the curriculum is undertaken in order to extract its impact on female individuality.

2.4.6 Summary of Education and Gender Reform

King Abdullah, was a hero for many Saudi women, a gender and an educational reformer, who had a grand vision and even started a congruent mission, but died before he could complete his strategic aims to achieve the reform that Saudi Arabia needed. In only nine years (2006 - 2015), because of his many reform oriented projects, King Abdullah is considered by many local and global analysts a true reformer. He has succeeded in gaining the people's trust and in building a new, positive socio-political bond, away from the religious framework of the country.

He has worked hard to reform the educational system in general and to support women in gaining their rights. His initiative, KAUST supported a mixed gender environment and relative freedom from the Salafi religious dress-code. Moreover, his naming of the largest university under a woman's name is a symbolic appreciation of the female gender (Pnu.edu.sa, 2015). Legitimizing female leadership in the Ministry of Education, and a recognition of the value of physical freedom and exposure to other cultures outside Saudi Arabia, and the dedication of a huge financial budget for schools and curriculum reform - all these measures are part of the Saudi state's aim to rebrand itself under the international pressure set by the events of 9/11. However, as far as a tangible reform is concerned, it was of a limited nature, as "as of yet", women are still denied "the right to make almost any significant decisions without the consent of a male relative" (Lacy, 2009, p.311). Especially in the educational levels before further education, neither the religious curriculum nor the real status of women has seen true reform.

Nora Al Fayez, who used to have the highest position in the Ministry of Education, is still under her male guardian's influence. For example, she requires his permission to attend conferences outside Saudi Arabia, and without him, she is denied the right to determine when and where to work, to travel or even to renew her ID or passport as proof of identity (Almugaiteeb, 2010). Moreover, she has been harshly criticized for not committing to the "Niqab", which is a conservative Islamic dress-code. A picture of her, with her face showing explicitly was posted online, to make her feel guilty for violating religious rules. In fact, in 2015, AL Fayez was discharged from her position shortly after King Abdullah died. The sudden metamorphosis in the situation is apparent from the image below. This picture is from her last speech, where she is seen wearing the Niqab symbolically (AlRiyadh, 2015).

نورة الفايز توجه كلمة «وداعية» بعد إعفائها من منصبها

Figure 2 Nora AL Fayez

Source: (Al-Riyadh, 2015)

Let us review further criticisms of King Abdullah's positively effective reforms. Among them, I would argue that KAUST, in spite of having achieved an extent of freedom regarding sex segregation and a generally hostile policy against the hegemony of Salafi opinions previously unheard of, is still a special campus isolated from real society and the "real world" of everyday Saudi life. KAUST works similarly to a spa resort outside of the bustling city life, with a utopian feel detached from the reality of Saudi society, where one goes to enjoy all the special facilities only as a form of escapism from one's daily environment, either to rest or feel reinvigorated again, but once one is out, one is undoubtedly back to the old structure of the public sphere, where sex segregation is its main theme and the main social rules still prevail. With regards to KASP, many female students are unable to benefit from the program, as some of them simply do not have a male guardian available or willing to travel with them or to at least open their applications. Finally, and most importantly, in regard of the religious curriculum, no hard evidence of true reform on issues within the content of the textbooks has been highlighted in the literature, which

is very poor to begin with. The same, unchanging textbooks are still printed by the government and disseminated to all schools, even private schools that are obliged to conform to the rigorous religious teaching imposed on them (Tashkandi, 2000).

The last few paragraphs sought to convey a general sense of Saudi society's stance towards women. More generally, I attempted to build a faithful picture of the relationship between religion and politics in Saudi Arabia, and of its impact on social norms regarding Saudi women and education. In doing so, I have captured the atmosphere and culture in which the new digital age was introduced, including new social media and social networks. When Twitter became available in Saudi Arabia, Saudi society and female education were still figurative battlefields between the conservative Wahhabi religious authorities and the political power trying to rebrand itself on the international stage. More importantly, this review will be useful in later analysis of female individuality in Saudi Arabia in the physical sphere, as a result of these social norms and conflicts. Therefore, it was necessary to present a critical image of Saudi society before introducing the next theme, social networking and Twitter in Saudi Arabia.

2.5 Social Networking: Definition and characteristics

Following a lengthy introduction and review of the existing literature on Saudi Arabian relationships between religion and politics, and their impact on Saudi women through the religious curriculum, the aim of this section is to examine the literature on the social networking platform Twitter and its use in Saudi Arabia. The expression "social networking" is used generally to define the new Internet platforms (Schein, Wilson and Keelan, n.d.) or any type of virtual social network interaction such as

YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. At first sight, the literature on this theme is discouragingly broad and wide-ranging. As such, search has been refined for relevant literature by narrowing the scope to certain key phrases, such as the "virtual platform", "online communities", "micro-blogging" and "social media". Additionally, because social media covers a wide range of research topics (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015), such as public health, business and psychology, the literature was comprehensive, in consideration of all those topics. Therefore, a major drawback presented by the literature is that it tended to focus on the characteristics of social media and their relation with myriad of other academic fields, without focusing on the use of Twitter in Saudi Arabia considering the theme of this thesis, which would have been ideal.

O'Keeffee and Pearson (2011) simply define social media as any website that allows social interactions. In broad terms, this is indeed the most comprehensive definition and also happens to be the least helpful one. There is a general agreement in the literature that the characteristics of social networking are based on interactivity, user-generated content, and multi-directional communication. Based on these characteristics, "the advent of social media has substantially changed the manner in which many people, communities, and/or organizations communicate and interact" (p.34). A review of the literature in different disciplines focused on Twitter specifically showed two important characteristics of the platform: interactive communication and user-generated information.

Recent studies have examined the nature and pattern of content and data on Twitter in different countries. For instance, some of them propose three types of user activities

on the Twitter network in relation to information content through connectivity, like, information seeking, information sharing and social activity. Other studies generally analysed the main activities of "tweeting, retweeting, following and having followers" (Naaman, Boase and Lai, 2010). Each study has its own perspective depending on the research topic, such as health, business, politics or psychology. The following paragraphs are concerned with understanding, through the abundant literature in that area, each of the two characteristics most relevant to this study, *i.e.* the nature of communication concerned with the interactive and high-connectivity aspects of social media and Twitter, followed by the nature of information, which seeks to explore the user-generated aspect of Twitter.

2.5.1 Nature of communication: interactivity and connectivity

Unlike traditional media, such as television for example, whose audience is conditioned to be passive in only receiving specific types of information according to their references; new social media does not allow for such unresponsiveness or lack of personal involvement. More specifically, in light of this research, new social media platforms are spaces where the users learn to take an interactive part in the conversation by connecting with other users. This is unlike the school curriculum in Saudi Arabia through which students learn to be only passive receivers of information. On Twitter, this is achieved either by 'following' certain people on Twitter, replying to their 'tweets', starting a 'hashtag', participating to other people's 'hashtags' and so on. Many of the studies reviewed in the context of this research agreed that to be connected and interactive is one of the positive features of social

media geared towards development in various fields, such as new marketing strategies in business, or cooperative development between e-governments and the societies.

In 2010, more than a billion individuals around the world were connected through new social media platforms (Cheung and Lee, 2010). Yet in current western discourses, there is a strong tendency towards the belief that social media can lead to a form of isolation. Many studies argue that one of the main shortcomings of virtual interactivity is that it induces a form of isolation from real life. Some studies go on further to put forward the idea that virtual isolation, in certain instances, such as in the gaming world, have led people to sustain a "second life" in the parallel dimension of online gaming, therefore losing their anchor in reality, "Much of human behaviour is not best characterized by an individual acting in isolation" (Bagozzi, 2007, p.245). Isolation from real life as a result of online escapism has sometimes led to a new mental illness, reported by certain studies, called "Facebook depression", defined as a specific form of depression that develops from the extensive use of Facebook (Tanner, 2011). This type of conclusion is not, however, unanimous in the psychological and medical profession. Jelenchick, Eickoff and Moreno (2013) argue that conclusions on "Facebook depression" and depression linked with social networking sites are premature and undefined as well as unquantifiable to this day. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some studies also found that social networking could offer more openness and comfort than real life, and could therefore encourage those who suffer from mental illnesses to share their situations online and find people who have gone through similar ordeals and could therefore give helpful advice or provide mental support. Thus, there is a potential that social media could be used to treat depression due to the high level of connectivity inherent to them (Moreno et al.,

2011). Therefore, the medical world remains ambivalent about the effect of prolonged social media usage. Notably, given the recentness of the social media phenomenon, the lack of hindsight providing a sizeable sample makes it difficult for researchers to draw significant and stronger conclusions.

Given the nature of Saudi society, as highlighted in the introduction, observations would suggest that some forms of isolation in the real society of Saudi Arabia could be treated through social media, such as the isolation from other school of thoughts in religious education, or the marginalization of women from the public sphere, or even intellectual isolation as a lack of learning in terms of new, meaningful information. Considering the cultural setting of Saudi Arabia, where the main theme of its social structure is isolation in many different forms, a platform for interactivity and connectivity such as Twitter is likely to have positive effects, which is investigated later. Indeed, the issue with most of the studies is that they were conducted in very different cultures than that of Saudi Arabia. Indeed, most of them come from the United States of America or Western Europe. Both of these environments are very different from Saudi Arabia, notably in their level of openness and their gender dynamics. Unlike western societies, the negative outcomes found in the virtual environment are current problems in the real environment of Saudi Arabia. Thus, it is very likely that the research results on Twitter and sociability in Saudi Arabia would contrast with results from that gathered in western societies.

While the level of interactivity in Twitter can pose issues relating to privacy and freedom of speech, it nevertheless makes people sharing similar ideas and passionate about similar causes connect. Here, personal behaviour theories and mass

communication theories are essential to understand the pattern of behaviour and formation of sets and groups in the virtual platform of Twitter (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015). For instance, given that the characteristic "connectivity" of social network technology affects how people live, communicate and learn, Siemens proposed "a learning theory for the digital age", called "connectivism" (Siemens, 2005). "Twitter users appear motivated to be connected to individuals with a common cause" (Smith, 2010, p.329). Thus the new nature of communication in the virtual community is heavily influenced by the nature of information on the platform and the way it is presented and argued, so as to make people group under certain similar banners, or "hashtags". The thesis therefore moves on to a review of the literature on the nature of information on new social media platforms.

2.5.2 Nature of Information: User-generated Content

Before the technological advancement that brought about the age of social media, reached its peak, only elite social groups, such as politicians, well-known artists and influential scientists, had the ability to create content and information spread through mass media (Perlmutter, 2008). Nowadays, most social media users collaborate in creating the content carried by these platforms (Perlmutter, 2008; Smith, 2010). In fact, the so-called 'user-generated content' is a key characteristic of the nature of information on new social media platforms. This means that every user contributes to the content of the platform by posting their opinions, quoting others, posting videos, drawings, caricatures and myriad other ways in which they can communicate and express themselves in an environment in which they are highly encouraged to be active agents rather than passive receivers.

Therefore, social media has been considered as having deeply altered "the information landscape" (Berenger, 2004; Bvuma, 2011; Al Jenaibi, 2011). They provide wider access to information as "in addition to the content itself, there is a wide array of non-content information available, such as links between items and explicit quality ratings from members of the community" (Agichtein et al., 2008, 183). Even by remaining silent, users can impact the content on these platforms, although usually, this type of behaviour would decrease an entity's popularity.

Social media give people opportunities to create, share, and exchange information in a virtual context by connecting with others (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015). Micro-blogging platforms, like Twitter, provide a forum for personal accounts and voices, which are sometimes followed by millions of people eager to enquire and gather information about current celebrity gossips, international news and opinions (Ramage, Dumais and Liebling, 2010). The website 'twittercounter.com' shows that in its "Twitter Top 100 Most Followers", the most popular accounts on Twitter can gather up to 60 to 70 million followers worldwide, and these accounts range from artists (Katy Perry is number 1 on the list), politicians (Barack Obama is 3rd), social activists (Ellen DeGeneres and Oprah Winfrey) to news agencies (notably CNN Breaking news and the NY Times). Although most of these celebrities are American, who top the list and occupy positions till the top 70, non-western celebrities, like Indian actors and directors Shahrukh Khan and Amir Khan, are listed at numbers below 70. The first Saudi national in the "Twitter Top 100" appears at rank 88 –Mohamad al-Arefe, who is the Imam (*i.e.* leader) of the Mosque of King Fahd Academy of the Saudi Navy, known on Twitter as @MohamadAlarefe (twitter Counter, 2015).

Thus, it is evident that the Twitter users and Twitter accounts can speak to an unprecedented and large audience with the use of this social media platform. As a result, the study of "how many people a piece of information reaches is very important in many different fields" (Zaman et al., 2010, p.1). More specifically in the context of this research, the question is as to how many Saudi women use Twitter and the way in which their experience could alter their perceptions of various traditionally salafi religious teachings? This in turn, could build their individuality accordingly and work towards social reform as a result of a shift in their own mind-sets. Yet this does not mean that the nature of user-generated contents only has positive qualities. On the contrary, there are several debatable points that many researchers have emphasised on the nature of information on Twitter, such as speed, time, or the length of the "140 characters" rule. As discussed below, significant proportion of the literature discusses two main features of Twitter, which are credibility and diffusion of information.

Previous research has demonstrated that the nature of the diffusion of information offers a great deal of potential, in terms of positive effects. Especially due to factors of speed, range and scale (Yang and Counts, 2010), Twitter can be an instrument, which can be utilized to raise awareness and mobilize a large number of people very quickly. In a study on Twitter and also on an online, early-warning network, it was shown that the early warning about an upcoming tsunami reached 4,102,730 Twitter users, informing them of the danger to come (Chatfield and Brajawidagda, 2012). Another study showed that the act of retweeting, *i.e.* sharing data that has already been posted, "tweeted", by other users, is a significant feature which helps the fast-spreading of information on Twitter (Zaman et al., 2010). The extreme speed at which a very large number of people can be informed and mobilized thanks to the inherent

features of Twitter exemplifies its uniqueness in a context, which differs from other social media platforms like Facebook. Facebook, although provides a feature, which provides the possibility to create "public" groups that any user can see, is relatively more private and exclusive, notably at the level of each user as an individual.

With regards to credibility, a few studies have suggested negative results as fallout of the existence and relative abundance of false information, and the ease at which users lose their critical skills and accept information uncritically. However, most of these warning studies are more focused on the internet search in general, disregarding social networks to a certain extent, and focusing instead on the absence of identifiable authors or references (Kubiszewski, Noordewier and Costanza, 2011). In the world of Twitter, some researchers evaluated the credibility of its informative content based on the amount of followers, "such that having too many or too few connections result in lower judgments of expertise and trustworthiness" (Westerman, Spence and Van Der Heide, 2012, p.199). Issues of credibility relating to the use of fake usernames and fake accounts were also widely discussed in the literature. However, in China for example, a study revealed a very subtle aspect of Twitter, namely "that individuals will continue to use the information in a computer-supported social network when they are satisfied with their prior usage, and when they perceive that the information in the network is useful." (Al-Haidari and Coughlan, 2015). Therefore, when Twitter users find out that certain sources are untrustworthy, they will stop following them, leading to their slow loss of popularity and final marginalization. In a way, Twitter has a self-filtering mechanism, which is also user-based (Jin et al., 2009, p.1172). Given the previous argument and the ever-growing number of Twitter users (316 million active monthly users), generating up to 500 million tweets a day (About

Twitter, 2015) it is fair to suggest that information in Twitter goes through at least a minimal process of filtration, especially when it comes to issues pertaining to social, political and religious debates.

In relation to the education system in Saudi, where books are banned from the kingdom when they are perceived as challenging to traditionally-constructed perceptions and beliefs, and where the internet is monitored to restrict access to specific websites, the face of Saudi culture and society in the digital age has been largely unexplored. The following sections provide an overview of Twitter usage in Saudi Arabia and its link to social reform.

2.5.3 Social Networking in Saudi Arabia: "Twitter"

The media has had a rocky history in Saudi Arabia, similar to the conflict of female education, as described previously. In fact, media conflict was the cause of the first demonstration in the history of Saudi Arabia. In 1963, the first TV stations in Riyadh and Jeddah were authorized by King Faisal, who was always disliked by the religious authorities for implementing reformist ideas in the country (Bligh, 1985). In 1965, staunch followers of the religious authorities, opposing the political leader, tried to attack the TV station in Riyadh, which only ended after violent armed conflicts between the demonstrators and the police forces (Bligh, 1985). According to the demonstrators' ideology, television is against Islamic values as it shows human figures. Given the illogical principle of their claim, the king overruled religious oppositions and television programs continued to be telecasted in Saudi Arabia. Again, similar to the situation regarding education, in order to preserve internal peace

and the power of the ruling authorities, a balance between religious and political powers was eventually achieved (Abu-Botain, 2011). Nevertheless, the development of mass media before the emergence of the Internet did expose Saudi society, to a limited extent, to other cultures. For example through players such as Monte-Carlo, which was an Arabic speaking radio station based in France (France24, 1973), or the first received satellite channels from Egypt, which aired the famous black and white Egyptian movies, displaying Egyptian lifestyles in the 50s. This reflected a more western approach taken by a different Arabic Muslim country. Yet Saudi Arabia remained a very private country, where the population was considered a passive audience with no agency in the matter.

In the late nineties, the Internet was made available in Saudi Arabia, which was the last country in the Arab world, with Syria, to access the new technology at a popular level (Wheeler, 2006; Miliany, 2013). Twitter was inaugurated in Saudi Arabia in 2006, but up until 2008, the use of Twitter was limited, "because the website did not support Arabic; it was only later, when people from all segments of society were able to participate, that the social pressure began." (Almaghlooth, 2013, p.71). It is worth noting, however, that Twitter use in Saudi Arabia is neither free nor unchecked. In fact, there is an increasing governmental effort in monitoring and arresting users, who tend to post online, content which is too critical towards the Saudi polity or religious settlement (Ghannam, 2011).

As noted previously, 50 percent of the population in the Arab world, including Saudi Arabia, are under 25 years of age, "while in the rest of the Arab region, the under-25, "net generation", makes up between 35 to 47 percent of total populations" (The Arab

Media Outlook, 2008-2012, 47; Ghannam, 2011, p.6). These are the most active segments of the population on social media. Blogging and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter allow individuals to write stories, express opinions and share useful information with people beyond social or geographical boundaries (Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Sohn, 2014). In Saudi Arabia, the CEO of Twitter, Dick Costolo, stated in an interview in 2012 that statistics showed that Saudis represent the fastest growing group on the virtual social platform of Twitter, increasing at a rate of 3,000 percent and providing "half of active users log in every day." (Los Angeles Times, 2012; English Alarabiya, 2012)

Yet two problems emerge in the relevant literature. Firstly, there is a disproportionate number of studies focusing on Facebook rather than Twitter, and as argued previously, these two platforms are not equivalent, hence the conclusions are not directly applicable. Secondly, academic research in the field of new social media in the Arab world tends to concentrate on political events, such as the Arab spring. Therefore it tends to ignore the gendered aspect of social change that Twitter could bring as a matter of circumstances. In 2011 only, after the outcome of the Tunisian revolution followed by the Egyptian revolution, more than fifteen studies on social media in the Arab world were produced, focused on the Arab spring revolutions. The Arab spring is a cornerstone of academic papers researching the use of Twitter in the Arab world. Tufekci and Wilson (2012), for example, observed the role of social media (particularly Facebook), in the Arab spring through an observation of the Tahrir protest[8]. They concluded by arguing that the platform offered a wider access to

[8] Tahrir protest: began on 25 January 2011when demonstrators in Cairo's *Tahrir* Square demanded the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

information that challenged political control, and that the nature and characteristics of information "were crucial in shaping how citizens made individual decisions about participating in protests" (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012, p.378). Another research discussed the role of social media, particularly Facebook, in the success of the Tunisian revolution. It concluded, however, that the Egyptians were the first Arab youth to use social media as a mobilization tool for political change (Harb, 2011). As Saudi Arabia has not experienced an "Arab Spring" *per se*, the country is hardly ever the focus of current research on social media and social reform, let alone topics relating to gender.

With relation to Saudi Arabia in particular, most of the sources are Ph.D. thesis on traditional media, such as television or the use of Internet in general. In her thesis, 'The Impact of the Internet on Saudi Students' Use of Television', Khulood Miliany compares the use of television and Internet without focusing on the influence of social media (Miliany, 2013). Yet interestingly, when it comes to Saudi Arabia, a unique type of revolution has been observed with regards to Twitter, which differs from the strongly political lens used to approach the rest of the Arab world, as shown previously. Several studies were found focusing on women driving online protests in Saudi Arabia. A whole chapter in the publication "Technologies and Democratic Governance" (Reddick and Aikins, 2012) was devoted to a case study on the Women's Right-to-Drive Campaigns on social media in Saudi Arabia, which was led by the activist Manal Alsharif in 2011 as a follow up to previous related online movements. It also included data from other driving campaigns such as 'Women2Drive' (Agarwal, Lim & Wigand, 2012). The study investigated and contributed a new understanding of collective action and the role of social media,

linking such protests to what has been perceived as a collective "Arab revolution". Cyber collective action was also discussed in another study supporting the importance of social media, similarly based on the same debate of women's driving campaign in Saudi Arabia (Yuce, Agarwal & Wigand, 2013).

In relation to research on the religious context, a related quantitative analysis of the 25 most retweeted messages among Saudis found, that 20 of them had religious messages (FNA social, 23 July 2013; Almaghlooth, 2013), "indicating that religion is a crucial gatekeeping factor in Twitter use among Saudis. The list confirms that Saudi users do not hesitate to retweet any tweet having a religious message, while thinking carefully before retweeting anything else, which is a reflection of broader societal influences on Saudi micro-bloggers" (Almaghlooth, 2013, p.251). This analysis did not look at gender, nor did it question the subjectivity of the data by using a solid, quantitative method. However, it does confirm the high intersectional influence of Twitter and religious understanding in Saudi Arabia, and shows that the ruling authorities have a strong watch on Twitter, limiting its "free speech" aspect and relatively preventing serious research from being undertaken out of fear of controversy.

The few papers mentioned here are considered first steps towards more insightful and numerous projects on Twitter in Saudi Arabia. Many researchers, in fact, such as Khulood Miliany, admitted to the early stage of their current contributions, and recommended further research as they realised the scarcity of serious studies on Twitter in Saudi Arabia. More specifically, Miliany revealed that her study presented a useful foundation to address media uses in relation to religious concepts in Saudi

Arabia (Miliany, 2013).

Similar to the studies conducted for the "Arab Spring", most of the research conducted on Twitter in Saudi Arabia has underestimated the importance of a qualitative method and its high credibility in providing a richer understanding of the platform's role in Saudi society. Although some qualitative methods were used among few researchers, they were limited to a small number of participants. One very recent study relating to the theme of this research used in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of the platform. The study observed how Saudi women expressed themselves on Twitter, and concluded that the relatively few gatekeeping elements on Twitter as opposed to real life provided Saudi women with a great space to express themselves and present their thoughts in the (virtual) public sphere. "It is apparent that social media contributed to granting women their voice ... or to reshape their offline identity" (Guta & Karolak, 2015, p.115). This thesis follows up on this argument and supports it by providing an insightful analysis of the school environment as a reference point to analyse the effect of Twitter.

Furthermore, in his 2014 paper, Irfan Chaudhry analysed the impact of Twitter in Saudi Arabia, asking whether the social media platform could bring about concrete social changes to Saudi society. The research marks a breakthrough in the sense that it succeeds in placing the much-debated Saudi women's driving campaign (and the less popular cycling campaign) in the regional framework of the Arab spring and a new, younger generation's push for reform. However, it fails to bring fresh perspectives through significant qualitative research, and instead focuses on linking past literature on various topics together in order to highlight the link between Twitter usage and social reform as a result of online activity, in addition to the specificities of gendered

issues in the wider context of the Arab Spring. Notably, Chaudhry concludes by quoting Evgeny Morozov: "digital tools are simply, well tools, and social change continues to involve many painstaking, longer term efforts to engage with political institutions and reform movements" (Morozov, 2011a; Chaudhry, 2014, p.956). To the question of whether Twitter has facilitated social reforms in Saudi Arabia, Chaudhry replies yes; but to the follow-up question of whether concrete social reforms have happened, it is on a negative yet hopeful note that Chaudhry concludes his article. With relation to the present research, actual, tangible social change is a marginal concern. This thesis focuses on the shift in female individuality thanks to Twitter, and the change in their behaviour and sets of beliefs as a result of their use of Twitter. In this sense, Chaudhry's research has contributed a great deal to the premises of the present research.

As mentioned above, in the Arab world, there is an increasing effort in monitoring and arresting users who post critical content online (Ghannam, 2011). Hence, despite the fact that some Saudis have gained wider freedom on the platform of Twitter, the freedom to criticize the political authority is still highly limited and under surveillance, especially when it comes to male activists. For example, Raif Albadawi was a "Saudi Arabian blogger who was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes for insulting Islam" (Burke, 2015). The line between the religious and the political in the nature of his offense is hard to define, given the symbiotic relationship between both authorities. Officially, "The Saudi cabinet has issued a formal letter to the ministries which was published by an e- newspaper, Al-Weam, in April 2012, warning civil servants not to criticize the government on the Internet or to sign any petitions addressed to the king" (Almaglooth, 2013, p.161). This indicates that the

extent of freedom that Saudi nationals may gain through Twitter only offers relative freedom on a socio-religious level, and is very much limited within a political frame. The way these dynamics work will be further explored in the second section of this thesis. Prior to that, this section reviews the theories used in this thesis that will provide the basic foundation for this research, as presented in the following theoretical framework.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

> "Valuing the theoretical life over the life of practice hints at high commitment to truth and contemplating the good life. Thus, theory can mean a rebuttal of practice, but it can also be seen in the service of practice, following practice, or as the essence of practice itself." (Manen, 2007, p.14)

This chapter is aimed at outlining and discussing the theoretical framework of the study. Many efforts have been made to understand human development and specifically gendered identity, but the development of an adequate conceptual framework for the development of such an understanding is a difficult task. The theoretical framework of a study refers to "the system of concepts and theories" that support and shape the research design (Maxwell, 2012). In this study, several important aspects were under consideration, which further complicated the search for an appropriate theoretical framework that would allow for the research questions to be addressed fully and comprehensibly. Drawing together multiple theoretical perspectives where each theory has its own concepts and criticism can prove quite challenging. This study nevertheless aims to combine a complex network of notions, such as the adoption of self- authorship and Islamic feminism. These ideas follow the central concept of this framework, gendered identity, and will help in understanding individuality among Saudi females in this thesis.

Scholars studying Saudi women often meet with difficulties in estimating the appropriate framework around which to structure their research. They may quite easily overextend their contextualization of the subject, or have trouble in determining the necessary data to answer the research questions fairly. The Saudi woman has consequently suffered from many superficial and over-simplified interpretations in which they are either portrayed with a wholly collectivist perspective or depicted from an extremely individualistic perspective. This is exemplified in the work of Al-Rasheed (2013) and Yamani (2000), which is discussed later in this chapter. Thus, in the context of a study focusing on Saudi Arabia, in order to avoid the aforementioned issues, a conceptual framework must be developed that is adapted to support a proper understanding of the Saudi woman. This is particularly the case considering the fact that studies of gender in Saudi Arabia have been used in the past by Western academics or liberal feminists and this can easily translate into a bias of findings if handled poorly.

For the purpose of this research, since "female individuality" falls under "human development", it was necessary to illustrate the implication of the term "human development" in this research.

Human development is an extremely massive concept to discuss within the scope of this thesis. Coming from a psychology education background, my understanding of human development starts from Aristotle, Freud's psychosexual theories, Erikson's psychosocial theories, Jung, and Maslow, and extends to a contemporary understanding of neurolinguistics programming. Human development is a highly studied subject with endless theories in many different disciplines such as politics, biology and theology.

Defining "human development" in this research required an initial reading on human development in many different fields like, sociology, education, neurology and politics. The review began with a study of the literature on educational influence on the development of children's minds from a neurological perspective. For example, Levine (2002), in his book "Mind at a Time" argues that education should pay attention to the development of the "individual mind" and that each child is unique. However, the book focuses on the "neuroscience" of mind development; it does not cover other aspects of development considered in this research such as identity and gender.

Another example is Piaget's work. Piaget was one of the most influential researchers who worked on the theory of human development (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). However, his theory cannot be adapted to define human development in this research for three main reasons. First, Piaget focuses only on children rather than on people of different ages (Inhelder et al., 1976). Second, he focuses on the "genetic" factors of "how we come to know" (Huitt and Hummel, 2003). Lastly, his research does not address the learning of information or specific behaviours. Therefore, it is unable to provide any insight for this research, which focuses on different age groups of participants studied in this thesis. My understanding of the concept of human development in this thesis is based on the characteristics of the research question. Therefore, the term "human development" in this research is driven by understanding the development of "individualism" in "gendered identity".

It was important to focus on theories that could serve the subject of this research and feed the analysis of the Saudi female in both the educational and the social media environments. Thus, this research uses the term human development based on the development of the individual from a particular gender (the right to be unique, as a woman), in other words "female individuality", as clarified in chapter one. Thus, the understanding of human development in this research does not come only from a traditional understanding of psychology or a purely educational or social philosophy; instead, it is driven by an intersectional understanding of two concepts: "individualism" as a departing concept and "gendered identity" as a central concept.

Therefore, the theoretical framework is introduced by understanding human development, specifically "female individuality", in two parts:

- *First*, is to explore "individualism". Theories within this concept could help illustrating a general overview of the current level of individuality in Saudi Arabia. Such illustration could act as a blueprint, to base the research on understanding gendered identity from a feminist and a psychological approach.

- *Second*, is to present "gendered identity" as a central concept of the theoretical framework. "Gendered identity" has been a central theme in countless research focussed on women all over the world. The aim here is to clarify the theorization of gendered identity as a central concept, and how it is being understood in this research.

Thus, the work is outlined with the following key concepts: individualism and gendered identity.

3.2 Individualism

> "The meaning of individualism depends on one's conception of the nature of individuality" (Wood, 1972, p. 7)

It is not adequate to present a complete understanding of the concept of individualism without presenting the deeply associated concept of "collectivism". Individualism or individuality is strongly contrasted with collectivism. Hence, most literature cannot discuss "individualism" without "collectivism". Therefore, in this study, both are discussed together.

The modern concept of individualism/collectivism (which dates back to the 19th century) started to enjoy its popularity since the publication of Hofstede's "Culture's Consequences" (Kagitcibasi, 1997). It has been proposed in many different disciplines. Discussions of its meaning can be found in ancient legal literature, political science, religious texts, and moral philosophy (Gelfand, Triandis and Chan, 1996). Many research works in international journals used the concept as a framework for different studies in areas such as sociology, theology, literature and politics (Kagitcibasi, 1979).

There are endless definitions of the term "individualism". Political philosophers define it as a social outlook that emphasizes the moral worth of the individual (Wood, 1972 p.7). In theology, it is defined differently by the scholars, with each definition

based on a different religion. For instance, Catholic Christians describe it as an attitude of individuals who refuse to submit completely to any external religious authority, or take an "à la carte approach" to what they believe, by accepting some aspects while rejecting others (The Catholic Encyclopedia). On the other hand, Islam thinks of individualism in accordance with the Qur'anic verse "there is no compulsion in religion" (Quran, Ch.1, verse 256). The theory has been defined in many religious disciplines. However, it is considered to be a cross-cultural psychological theory, due to the fact that one third of published social-psychology studies in the '90s used it as a partial explanation of observed cross-cultural research (Hui &Yee, 1994; Kagitcibasi, 1997).

In this thesis, use of the term "individualism" is driven by a cross-cultural psychological theory. In cultural psychology literature, it is defined as the right of free thinking and the freedom of actions for the individual over collectives. More specifically, my understanding of the concept comes from Triantis's contribution, who refers to it as the ways in which people identify their own identities based on their own personal perceptions and attitudes; they behave primarily on the basis of their attitudes rather than the norms of the society (Triandis, 2001).

In contrast, collectivism is where individuals give priority to the goals of the group, this shapes their behavior in the society, and they "behave in a communal way" (Mills & Clark, 1982; Triandis, 2001). In other words, the individual treats the in-group as an authority over one's own perceptions and attitudes. This point is further explained in detail in the discussion of the "self-authorship theory".

To obtain an overview of the level of individualism/collectivism, Triandis (1995) states the four defining factors of individualism/ collectivism; how students as individuals perceive themselves, how they relate to others, the goals they follow, and what concerns drive their behaviour. Based on these factors, he presents the following four attributes of individualism/collectivism.

- **Horizontal Individualism (HI)** encourages equality of all people but with the appreciation that each person is unique (Triandis, 2001).

- **Vertical individualism (VI)** is driven by competition. It states that the self is unique and people seek to gain positions of high status and consequently inequality is expected (Cozma, 2011).

- **Horizontal collectivism (HC)** states people are interdependent, that the self is merged with the in-groups, people are extremely similar to each other and that equality is essential (Cozma, 2011).

- **Vertical collectivism (VC)** Unlike HC, inequality is accepted and people do not see each other as the same. Some have authority over the others; people serve and sacrifice their personal goals for the in-group's goal (Cozma, 2011).

This thesis defines individuality based on the understanding of "horizontal individualism" and considers it healthier than "vertical individualism", where inequality is expected. The above "cultural psychology" theory follows the lead of Al-Rasheed's book "The Most Masculine State" (Al-Rasheed, 2013), discussed in

section **3.3**. In her argument she seems to indicate that the right for developing individualism (as it is being understood in this research) in the Saudi culture is being conceptualized in highly gendered ways. Hence, the theoretical framework of this research becomes more focused on the development of horizontal individualism "in relation" to gendered identity. Thus, this development is achieved based on the right to understand one's identity and its relation to attitudes and perceptions. In other words, this thesis bases the development of individualism on the ability to achieve self-authorship as a *Saudi Muslim woman*. Developing this theme, it is essential to present "gendered identity" as the central concept of this chapter.

3.3 Gendered Identity

The modern definition of the term "gendered identity" is generally a *person's concept of self* as a *member of a particular gender* (Zucker and Bradley, 1995). This term has been mainly discussed in two different ways. Some scholars such as Freud and Jung use it in reference to sexual identity, psychosexual approach and other biological categorization such as homosexuality, both male and female. Others such as Butler discuss it by highlighting a contrast between "sex" as biological and "gender" as social construct. Simone de Beauvoir (1973) also conceptualises gendered identity as a social construct. Following Beauvoir's lead, this thesis uses the term "gender" in a more sociological context rather than a biological context. The research focuses on the idea of *women* within the cultural context of Saudi culture. Thus, the intersectional understanding of "gendered identity" in this study refers to its modern definition, "a *person's sense of self*" and this is explored in (**3.3.2**: psychological approaches to Identity), as a "*member of a particular gender*" is explored in (**3.3.1**: feminist approaches to gender).

Gender research has, in the last century, received a great deal of attention in the social sciences. There is a widely present existence of feminism and feminist ideas worldwide that share one goal: gender equality and women's rights but all of them approach this ultimate goal in different ways. The various kinds of feminism include political feminism, Marxist feminism and economic feminism among others. This multiplicity of feminism groups demonstrates the variety of concepts even within this one ideology. Generally, in feminist theory, gendered identity is proposed as "durable but not immutable phenomenon" (McNay, 2000, p. 2). Two works that are highlighted in their focus on the definition of female identity in Saudi Arabia are presented in Al-Rasheed's and Yamani's book. These works provide guidance, by way of example, as to the ways in which the concept of gendered identity is approached in this theoretical framework.

Firstly, Yamani's book (2000), *Changed Identity*, revolves around the topic of identity among the new generation in Saudi Arabia. Also, Chaudhry (2014) argued for a fundamental gap observed between older generations of Saudis who failed to see the importance of seeking a public life and involvement in social reform or political aims. A new generation of Saudis has been largely recorded as being in the pursuit of a more intellectually fulfilling and satisfactory life than being merely confined to their homes, especially for women. Yamani's book furthers this observation in that it characterizes, as far as possible, the precise ways in which Saudi identities are becoming different, the transition from a traditional set of beliefs to a modern, forward-looking and active set of beliefs. Unfortunately, her research was conducted before the rise of social media or the events of 9/11 (Yamani, 2000). The 9/11 tragedy

has had a tremendous impact on the geopolitical atmosphere of the world, and has led to the application of a great amount of pressure on the Saudi government to produce meaningful reforms, as discussed in the previous chapter. Since Yamani's research antedates the events of 9/11, it can only be of limited value for this research, even though it will be very helpful in suggesting a structure for the analysis to come.

Secondly, Al-Rasheed's book (2013) provides this research with a more recent study on Saudi women. Despite the book's aim to give a voice to the female participants, it falls short of looking at each individual's unique experience and the ways in which each of the participants received, reflected and possibly challenged the meaning of her female identity. The author has focused on the historical and political context of what shapes female individuality. Critically speaking, in fact, Al-Rasheed's book gives a disproportionate portrayal of the foundational theories, and the participants are displayed as illustrators of historical changes. By emphasising this sense of historical determinism, Al-Rasheed's book provides a wealth of important information and has inspired the theoretical framework and the methodology of the present research greatly. It, however, highlights the type of practices that academics have conducted, up until now. This thesis aims to avoid this and takes into consideration a notably broad range of women for interviewing to contribute to research methodology. Thus, it appeals to a wider range of theories in support of the research.

Taking into account the lessons learnt from Yamani and Al-Rasheed's example, approaching "gendered identity" in this study must be sensitive and inclusive of the role of politico-religious authorities and their influence on the personal and internal processes of the individual. The aim is to understand and then faithfully transcribe in

this study the existing dynamics between different dimensions and forms of social relationships and subject formations (McCall 2005) to the largest and clearest extent possible. Thus, the concept "gendered identity" is positioned within two fields: feminist approaches to gender and psychological approaches to" identity".

3.3.1 Gender: feminist approaches to gender

Intersectionality and subjectification are two important feminist concepts used in gender-focused research. In view of the diverse landscape of feminist theories, the importance of "intersectionality" is central to feminist theory.

A large amount of work on feminism subscribes to Foucault and Lacan's views on subjectification in relation to gender research (King, 2013). In feminist psychoanalysis research, the concept of subjectification was used widely and was greatly influenced by Lacan's work, which in turn was highly influenced by Freud's view, including the psychosexual theory (Grosz, 2002). Many feminists refer to his work on human subjectivity to challenge phallocentric knowledge; others are extremely critical of it, accusing him and Freud of producing phallocentric theories by "taking men as the norm and woman as what is different therefrom" (Grosz, 2002, p.142).

Initially, subjectification was considered to be a theory proposed by Michel Foucault and expanded by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Bröckling, 2005). Foucault defines subjectification as a formation process in which "societal organization and self-constitution bleed into one another" (Bröckling, 2005, p.9).

Although Foucault was highly influential in many of the feminist works on gender

and subjectification (King, 2013), there is a high level of criticism among feminists in relation to Foucauldian philosophy on subjectification. Many feminists adapted subjectification in their work on gender; however; they have considered the shortcoming of these views and proposed alternative theoretical foundations, away from the subjectification of Foucault and Lacan (McNay, 2000).

The main shortcoming of subjectification is that researchers ignore the way the overall categories work and intersect with different lived experiences of subjects. For that reason, some studies suggested to re-question the concept (McNay, 2000). As a result, most of the recent feminist philosophy considered intersectionality as a significant approach in exploring gender. It is worth noting that some of them suggest integrating both Subjectification and Intersectionality (Staunaes, 2003). When Foucault explained subjectification he introduced it as a formation process that happens through the intersection between societal-organization and self-constitution. In other words, subjectification only happens as a result of intersectionality. Thus, the following paragraphs discuss, in detail, intersectionality.

In the early 1980's there were publications of several significant arguments in antiracist feminist theory in which the concept of "intersectioanlity" was elaborated (Moraga and Anzaldúa; A. Davis; Smith; Lorde; Hooks; Mohanty, Under Western Eyes; Carastathis, 2014). Although the concept was discussed earlier by scholars in 1989, the term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw as a feminist sociological theory (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw uses intersectionality to mainly describe patterns of racism and sexism. A more recent definition of intersectionality was proposed by Davis (2008); in her paper, she defines it as the interaction between multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and marginalization. Feminist

researchers have come to understand that the individual's social location as reflected in intersecting identities must be at the forefront in any investigation of gender (Shields, 2008). Thus, feminist journals are likely to reject papers on gender that have not given sufficient attention to intersectionality as they simply consider them "theoretically misguided" or "politically irrelevant" (Davis, 2008, p.68)

Intersectionality became popular among feminists in the late seventies to the early eighties. During that period, there were many claims from feminists such as Heidi Hartmann and from feminist organizations that it is essential to consider the importance of "interlocking oppressions" (Beeden & Van Zyl, n.d.). Later on, other feminists and sociologists suggested that there are many more differences to be considered. In 2002, Helma Lutz proposed that there are at least fourteen lines of differences, including age, gender, power, skin colour and class (Beeden and Van Zyl, n.d.). Since its formation, intersectionality has been heralded as one of the most important contributions (Davis, 2008) of feminist theory to our recent understanding of gender (Shields, 2008). Scholars argue that the lack of ontological discussions has led to the increasing popularity of the intersectional approach (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013).

Intersectionality can be incorporated into empirical research on gender and can be used to answer social and psychological questions at individual, interpersonal and social levels (Shields, 2008). Hancock highlights this argument proposing that the concept "is concerned even in its theoretical voice with the practical implications of its arguments" (Hancock, 2007 p.71). In addition, there is a general agreement that intersectionality enables researchers to look at both "oppression and opportunity"

(Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996; Shields, 2008). Therefore, it is important in contributing to the complexity of processes of individual development and social inequality (Prins, 2006). Although, within this general agreement, there are important differences in how the intersectional approach is interpreted in different countries (Prins, 2006).

The US approach follows the systematic interpretation, which is based on the impact of the system on the "formation" of identities, whereas British researchers adapt a constructionist interpretation, which focuses on the dynamic and relational aspects of social identity (Prins, 2006). Prins in her study on identity formation argues that systemic approach in the theory of intersectionality can limit possibilities for representing complexity. She believes that in a systematic approach for example, the "human subject is "primarily constituted by systems of domination and marginalization" (Prins, 2006, p.280). Therefore, it disqualifies some of the ways in which people choose to identify because it treats identity predominantly as a matter of categorization and naming (Prins, 2006). On the other hand, the constructionist approach allows for more depth, contradiction and complexity (Phoenix, 2011; Prins, 2006), which is the most appropriate approach for the Saudi woman.

Regardless of its high popularity and the role it played in transforming the way gender is conceptualized in research (Shields, 2008), there has been considerable debate. Some critical thoughts highlighted the way intersectionality is handled and how it could be adapted in feminist work (Davis, 2008). Feminist researchers share a sense of confusion on their views of the intersectional approach to gender research; some propose it as a theory while others argue that intersectionality is a method or a dynamic process (Lykke, 2010). Nevertheless, intersectionality is significantly useful

as a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it, such as managing complexity, as discussed below.

Special issues of feminist journals have devoted their focus on investigating the theoretical complexities of intersectionality (Davis, 2008). The basis of McCall's views of intersectionality is that social interactions are complex and intersected (McCall, 2005, p.1786). She proposed three different approaches for scholars to manage complexity and to describe what can be achieved or sacrificed in the process.

1. *The Intercategorical approach* "focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories" (McCall 1786; Carastathis, 2014, p.308), and simply rejects categories.

2. *The Intracategorical approach* works on the neglected points of intersection with specific social groups, "people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups" (Dill 2002, 5; McCall, 2005, p.1774) in order to expose the complexity of lived experience within particular groups.

3. *The Anticategorical approach* is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories (McCall, 2005).

Moreover, Hancock argues that intersectional approaches are 'inclusive and incisive' and foster 'deep political solidarity' (Hancock 183; Carastathis, 2014). Hancock describes inclusivity of intersectionality as a unique approach in "its attention to applications, the ways in which it conceptualizes the constitution of,

relationship between and multi-level analysis of categories of difference is in fact unique" (Hancock 2007 p. 69).

This thesis uses the term "intersectionality" in terms of "gendered identity" from a feminist perspective by presenting the concept of "Islamic Feminism" and from a psychological perspective by integrating "the private" and "the public" self, as discussed below.

- **Islamic Feminist Theory**

"Feminists do not all think the same way or even about the same kinds of problems"

(Yamani, 1996, p.I)

Islamic feminism is an extension of the feminist theory that is discussed globally, but with a very specific aim and perspective in its understanding of women's rights and gender equality within the religion of Islam. Recent ideological shifts in the Western world (Whitcher, 2005) have encouraged many Muslims to examine the concept of gender from an Islamic perspective (Majid, 1998). However, the existence of a critical outlook on what Islamic feminism is and what it aims to achieve requires a deep awareness of the social, political, and geographical background of each scholar. In this research, the concept of Islamic feminism is derived from Sunni sources, and the "Qur'an" and "Hadeeth[9]" are considered the building basis of the concept's definition. Islamic feminism is a movement pushing for women's rights to develop their individuality through deep and meaningful intellectual independence, including the right to education and information. These rights are granted by the religious texts and

[9] Hadeeth: The prophet's sayings.

used to be enforced by the Prophet (PBUH). Islamic feminism is concerned with bringing back the idea that the religion of Islam is a proponent of female development and independence rather than the background ideology depicted by many scholars and the mainstream media worldwide nowadays, a development that can be partially explained by current affairs.

Like feminism in general, Islamic feminism refers to a wide range of ideologies and has been the subject of a plethora of studies and debates. Some scholars have chosen to focus on political Islamic feminism, others on geographical Islamic feminism. While many approached Islamic feminism by concentrating on the Islamic veil, both from a freedom-focused perspective to abandon the Islamic dress code and a freedom-of-choice perspective in wearing it. For instance, when the French authorities banned the hijab in state schools in 2004, many Muslims all around the world protested against such a decision, which was seen as a stripping of Muslim women of their choice to wear it. Observations on the Islamic headscarf triggered many different views among feminists; some perceived it to be an act in support of feminism, while many others protested to defend the freedom of choice to wear the Islamic veil as an essential part of feminism in terms of women being allowed to define their own identity rather than having it imposed on them by external authorities. In France, Muslim women protesters were carrying banners with slogans, such as: "The veil: my choice" and "Beloved France, where is my liberty?" (Veil of Tears, 2004, p.34; Falah and Nagel, 2005, p.1) This research studies the issue of freedom of choice in whether or not to wear Islamic clothes as defined for Saudi females in the course of an analysis of personal identity in the process of individuality-building.

The literature review has pointed to the need for further research on "Saudi Feminism" as a different intersectional branch under the main banner of Islamic feminism, which is itself comprised under the umbrella concept of "feminism". Similar to the Russian dolls toy, these analytical categories fit into one another. Many of the related studies on Islamic feminism give a general sense that research on women's issues in Islamic countries should be rich and insightful. So far however, most of the research in the field of Islamic feminism has been concerned with women's issues in Iran, Lebanon, Egypt and Muslim communities in the west, with a lack of focus on the Saudi woman.

Feminism in Islam (Yamani, 1996), a book focussed mainly on studies of feminism in the Gulf and Arab countries. For instance, Marsot (1996) in her paper, points out that education for women during the 1930s in Egypt was the first step toward Egyptian women's rights. More specifically, education made them fight for their rights as they gained awareness of women's rights in Islam, rather than copying the concept of Western feminism. Siddiqui (1996) extends this point in her study by emphasizing the influence of women's education not only in increasing her awareness of her professional or political needs but also on her emotional needs in choosing her husband and approaching the concept of marriage. Furthermore, Karmi's argument (1996) suggests that women's issues in Islam could be resolved from an objective observation of the Qur'an in its historical and social context. Feminism in Islam therefore provides a framework of elements to study female individuality. It perceives Muslim women as drivers of social reform, education (to be understood in the broader sense of learning in general, beyond the school environment) and the idea that the original Islamic texts encourage equality between both genders. This therefore

provides a valuable framework within which to approach each underlying theme of Islamic and Saudi feminism.

Some authors disagree with the extent and qualification of gender equality, such as Elnimr (1996), who argued that women cannot choose everything for themselves, justifying issues of inequality in some religious interpretations based on the different nature of women, such as pregnancy, hormonal changes and unstable mood. However, their arguments are not totally nihilistic to Islamic feminism. In fact, this argument is reminiscent of second-wave feminism in Europe, which is a general trend observed after the Second World War that supported the idea that despite the pursuit of equality, men and women are unquestionably different, but biological differences do not justify the oppression of one gender by the other.

Other scholars looked at how Islamic texts were used for social, political and ideological motives. For example, Munira Fakhro's paper (1996) highlights the potential for solving many female issues by taking a political route. Many scholars have supported the idea that the political and religious authorities of the country should support a democratic system, could give birth to Islamic feminism. However, the religious and political authorities support and justify each other, with the backing of Salafi interpretations of the Islamic texts (Yamani, 1996). Yamani's article (1996) on Saudi women in specific concludes with the importance of achieving social justice for women by going back to pure Islamic values, bar the Wahhabi school of interpretation. She summarizes it thus; "Strict segregation of the sexes in all spheres restricts physical mobility. It is a matter of national policy that women wear the black veil in public or not drive cars" (p.263). She ends by explaining the case of

cosmopolitan and powerful Saudi women, depicted as women who have created their own social values and their own religious perceptions. Al-Rasheed, in her most recent book, centralizes Saudi women as the main source of influence on the politics, global image, educational achievements, religion and dynamics of authority of Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 2013). This demonstrates the centrality of the 'woman' question, both in this study and in the geopolitical situation worldwide.

Literature on Islamic Feminism, such as Al-Rasheed's book summarized the influence of religion and socio-political authorities on gendered identity by providing a great socio-political analysis of the collected data. However, most of them ignored the psychological approaches to the concept. In order to provide answers to the research questions, the aim in this research is to position the central concept of "gendered identity" within two fields of research: feminist approaches to gender as discussed above and psychological approaches to identity in the following section.

3.3.2 Identity: psychological approaches to identity

What would an identity mean in isolation? Isn't it only through other people that we form our perceptions of who we are and how we behave? In order to define identity in isolation or among others let us look at the psychological meaning of identity. Identity is the human capacity to understand who we are, who others are, and who we are in relation to who others are (Jenkins, 2014). This multidimensional categorization of mapping the human world draws our definition as individuals and as members of collectivists (cf. Ashton et al. 2004; Jenkins, 2014). The following discussion on

psychological approaches to identity is inspired by the aforementioned cultural theory of individualism /collectivism.

The psychological approach to identity discussed in this chapter follows the debate on what defines an "individual" between the individualists' perspective (internally motivated beliefs) and collectivists' perspective (the external society). This section explores a move from the cultural term "individual" divided between individualist and collectivist, to the psychological term "identity" divided among psychologists between the private self and the public self. Identity, such as gender or social class, may be experienced as a feature of individual selves, "the private self", but it also reflects the operation of power relations among groups that comprise that identity category "the public self" (Shields, 2008).

In general, psychologists approach the very broad term of "identity" as the private and the public self (Baumeister, 1986). There are many theories that focus on the exploration of the private self, such as the theory of self-concept (Markus and Wurf, 1987), self-perception (Bem, 1973), self-representation (Harter, 1998) and the theory of the "true self" (Tolle, 2003). On the other hand, there are various theories dedicated to the understanding of the public self, such as the political identity, the social identity and the "egoic self" in contrast with the "true self" (Tolle, 2003). However, the understanding of any one of them requires a strong knowledge of the other. Therefore, similar to feminists' approach to gender, psychologists consider the importance of "intersectionality" as an approach to understanding "identity".

From an intersectional approach, identity theorists conceptualize "identity" as the set of meanings that are related to the concept of the self as an individual; this concept

cannot operate by itself without intersecting with various roles and situations based on membership groups to which the individual belongs (Stets 1995; Stets & Burke, 1996; Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, it is important to study this central area where the identity and the society intersect with each other in order to provide a vivid psychological understanding of the term "identity". Hence, the psychological approach to "identity" in this research is based on the exploration of the private and the public self, which led to the discussion of the self-authorship theory.

- **Exploring identity through the private-self**

The private self has been afforded a "prestigious status" among psychologists (Baumeister, 1986). The self is reflexive as it can take itself as an object and categorize or name itself in particular ways (Stets & Burke, 2000). This process is known as self-identification, which leads to the formation of identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Identity in psychological terms relates to awareness of self, self-image, self-reflection, and self-esteem (Shields, 2008). "In contemporary American society, identity is emphasized as a quality that enables the expression of the individual's authentic sense of self" (Shields, 2008, p.301). Social psychologist Daryl Bem proposed an important theory of identity named the "self-perception theory". It represents one of the most influential theories of how identity unfolds (Bem, 1972).

Self-perception theory is an approach that explains how people come to know of themselves merely by observing their own behaviour. It was originally developed to empirically examine questions in the "philosophy of mind" (Bem, 1972). Questions include the following: "How does the person know himself?" "Is it an observation? Or an inference, or direct knowledge?" How does the perception develop from the

first person statement, "I'm a Saudi woman" to a third person statement "She is a Saudi woman"? In early times, psychologists preferred to leave these questions to the philosophers as most of the discussions were initially philosophical rather than empirical in nature. In fact, Skinner was the only scholar in the fifties that treated such questions from a psychological approach in publications such as "Radical Behaviourism" (Bem, 1972) and eventually inspired the formation of self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). Self-perception theory, therefore, asserts that people function as observers of their own behaviours and then make a contribution to either an external environment (situational) or their own personal characteristics (dispositional).

The main reason why self-perception theory has been so influential is because of the simplicity of its explanation of how self-knowledge develops, which means that people come to know themselves merely by observing their own attitudes. It examines how people simply use their own behaviour to influence their own perceptions and attitudes.

Self-perception theory was initially suggested as an alternative to "cognitive dissonance" theory, which is the experience of holding two cognitions that are inconsistent with one another (Bem, 1967). Since then, psychology literature strongly contrasts the theory of self-perception with the cognitive dissonance theory. However, empirical research is unable to provide better confirmation for one theory over the other (e.g, Snyder & Ebbesen, 1972; Ross & Shulman, 1973; Green, 1974; Greenwald, 1975).

Cognitive dissonance theory proposes that people are motivated to maintain consistency between their self-beliefs and that they experience an unpleasant state of dissonance when they hold two inconsistent beliefs about the self. This idea can be related to the contradictory images and dissonance situations of the Saudi women discussed in the literature review and, later, in the analysis.

On the other hand, self-perception theory does not necessarily assume that contradiction must exist between perceptions and attitudes for people to adjust their knowledge of their private self. It claims that the person can use his/her own behaviour to infer knowledge of the private self when the internal cues of initial beliefs are unclear or weak, whereas cognitive dissonance theory assumes that the person adjust the knowledge of his/her private self only when the internal cues of prior beliefs are clear and in contradiction with his/her freely chosen attitudes.

Self-perception theory does not necessarily see the contradiction between the perception and attitudes; it focuses on the idea that attitudes and perceptions are influenced by the society. It only requires people's willingness to infer their own attitudes and beliefs by considering the environmental and dispositional causes for their own actions for changes in self-knowledge to occur.

The debate between self-perception theory and cognitive dissonance theory provides a significant insight in terms of understanding the private self in the case of Saudi women. It explains how awareness of the private self can develop in different conditions such as Saudi schools and Twitter. Nevertheless, self-perception theory, as a psychological approach, has become increasingly appreciated by academics because

of its ability to account for a wider variety of self-attribution phenomena, such as the "digital self" (Yee, Bailenson and Ducheneaut, 2009).

The intersectional approach suggests that an understanding of the relationship between perceptions and attitudes can explain the adjustment of understanding the "private self" under different circumstances. In general, the private self cannot be understood without an understanding of the public self. Perceptions and motives for attitudes are connected according to the above theories. This claim is also made by social psychologists such as Jenkins (2014), as discussed below.

- **Exploring identity through the public self**

The understanding of the "public self" in this work is informed by the social identity theory (SIT). This is to avoid an endless discussion and debate on the public self in psychological literature. Indeed, there are other theories that could possibly fit in this framework such as the national identity, the digital identity or the religious identity theory. All these theories are of great importance; however, the social identity is more context-dependent (Maldonado and Muehling, 2006). Theories such as those about the national, religious or digital identity are more specific to particular aspects of the identity, such as nationality and religion. This section studies "identity" in a psychological rather than a purely political, or religious or exclusively "digital" aspect. It focuses on addressing the classic relationship of the individual to the group and the emergence of collective phenomena from "individual cognitions" (Brown, 2000).

Unlike the aforementioned theories, SIT combines complexities and flexibility; it categorizes the social group based on "any" "complex" factors that shape it (Brown, 2000). Such "flexibility" fits perfectly in the case of Saudi society in this research. Hence, this thesis focuses on developing identity from a psychological perspective by placing it within this context of understanding gender identity.

Social identity theory defines the public self as a presentation of the individual's concept of the self, influenced by the surrounding social factors. It is a social category in which an individual accepts membership with a particular society, culture, or group (Ashmoreet al. 2004). Similar to the self-perception theory, SIT suggests that the membership to a social group could influence people's attitudes and behaviours (Tajfel, 1981). People model their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours based on the group (Maldonado, Tansuhaj, and Muehling 2003; Reed 2002; Tajfel and Turner 1985; Sierra, Hyman and Torres, 2009). There are a number of different approaches in understanding the influence of the social group on the public self, as discussed below.

Researchers such as Sierra, Hyman and Torres (2009) propose three main concepts in SIT: (1) people define and evaluate themselves based on the social groups; (2) the subjective condition of a social group decide if an individual's social identity is positive or negative; and (3) non-group members provide an outline of reference in order to evaluate another group's condition (Tajfel 1978; Sierra, Hyman and Torres, 2009). These three concepts are categorized by three aspects; cognitive, evaluative, and emotive (Tajfel 1978b, 1981; Sierra, Hyman and Torres, 2009). Awareness of belonging to a group is the cognitive aspect; the positive or negative implication of

being a member in that group is the evaluative aspect; and assumptions about how others feel toward one's membership in the group are the emotive aspect (Sierra, Hyman and Torres, 2009). They contribute to self-image and self-satisfaction and help to define a person's perception of the self, which was discussed earlier.

Other scholars, such as Castells, proposed more recent concepts in understanding social identity. Since this research also focuses on the virtual environment of social media, it was significant to look at an approach that could feed the analysis in both environments. Castells' reference to social identity is useful to provide a more structural nature to the analysis when looking at types of identities. This is shown in the conclusion of Chapter 6 (defining Identity).

Castells argues that all social identities are constructed from building materials such as media, religion, productive institutions and personal memories (Castells, 2010). Identity is, in essence, people's way of referring and reflecting on their own individuality, as well as their tool for 'meaning-making' and their channel to gather experience. He proposes the power of individuality as a source of meaning over the social role of the individual. In his view, identities are stronger because of the process of self-construction and individuation that they involve; in other words, identities organize the meaning of one's being while roles dictate one's functions (Castells, 2010).

In a changing society like the Saudi, new types of identities start to become outdated frameworks of analysis, notably because of the role of new social media. Therefore, in order to examine these different types of identities comprehensively in both the

educational system and the social media, Castells' concept of social identity (2010) can be aptly applied to this research. He summarized social identities in three different types, how and what builds them and most importantly, how they evolve as dynamic categories with bridges between them. He suggests a distinction between three forms of identity building: legitimizing identity, resistance identity, and project identity.

Legitimizing identity, is introduced in a given society by a dominant institution, such as the school. Castells (2010) argues that this type of identity is closely intertwined with Sennett's theory of authority and domination and also with theories of nationalism. This type of identity revolves around the idea of subjugation to the ruling power (be it political or religious) by adhering to its ideologies and policies and fostering their success in society. As such, it is usually characterized by a deep level of acceptance of the ruling authority's teachings and decisions and defines itself as a follower of the ruling authority.

Resistance identity refers to those social actors who build a type of resistance, which is opposed to the logic of domination as a tool and characteristic of social institutions. In this research, the main opposition was towards a specific socio-religious manifestation. Castells also relates this type of identity to Calhoun's (1994) thought on the emergence of identity politics. This is partially noticeable with the use of Twitter, which offers great potential for fast political mobilization as was shown in some of the literature reviewed in the previous chapter. In a way, similarly to the legitimizing identity, it also refers to the ruling power in the sense that it defines itself against it.

Project identity: is generated by those actors who build new types of identities that redefine them in the society based on some new cultural materials that are available to them. Their identity is neither legitimizing of the status quo nor resistant to it. In fact, it is not defined in relation to the fabric of society. Instead, it creates a transformation or a reform in the social structure. This is the case for instance with the platform of Twitter, which constitutes and provides new cultural material for Saudi women to envisage a new form of identity. In a gendered context, Castells (2010) links this type of identity to feminism and defines it as the moment when feminism "moves out of the trenches of resistance of women's identity and women's right" (p.10) to challenge the external power, such as the political and social authorities.

The way in which different types of identities are constructed, and the outcomes of this process, cannot be addressed in general, abstract terms; it is a matter of social context (Castells, 2010). Castells' appreciation of the centrality of the idea of local specificity is a valuable element of his theory. From this premise, this thesis seeks to outline trends that are characteristic of Saudi society.

Castells' types of identity, and other concepts in SIT discussed earlier, proposed an explanation of the definition of the public self by providing a common springboard for the aforementioned modifications to the understanding of the self in relation to others. SIT is a significant approach in many psychological studies on identity. Indeed, despite living in the digital age, where social media platforms and the virtual world are deeply influential in the creation of the individual, the present study first considered the traditional channels of learning in the educational system. This was

done in order to conduct a thorough and clear exploration of the two environments. As Ching and Floley (2012) argue, "The focus on identity would be incomplete if we did not include a focus on learning" (p.3). This leads to the discussion of the self-authorship theory.

- **Self-authorship Theory**

As stated before, female individuality is understood through two key concepts: individualism and gendered identity. Identity, as it is explored above, is dependent on one's self-authorship and sense of agency against external authorities. Each individual's character is born of an interplay of the private and the public self. The present section of the theoretical framework examines the theory of self-authorship as introduced by Baxter Magolda (2008). Her work in this field was based on over 20 years of qualitative research undertaken with college students at the University of Miami (Davidson, 2011). The richness of her theory, exploring everything from Perry's theory on dualist thinking to relativist thinking, and the way it resonated with the previous literature on student development and individuality prompted me to adopt it as one of the theoretical foundations of this research.

Self-authorship is defined by Magolda as "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations" (Magolda, 2008, p.269). Self-authorship and its development consist of four phases (Davidson, 2011). *Following formulas* highlights the influence of external authorities and their formulas that are imposed on young adults. Students follow the rules laid out for them while telling themselves that they created these rules. *Crossroads* results in the need to establish new rules; when the

rules that have been followed do not necessarily fit anymore, students are dissatisfied with others' definitions or beliefs. *Becoming the author of one's life* highlights the ability to choose one's own beliefs and stand up for them, especially when facing resistance or challenging views. *Internal foundation* places the self-determined belief system in students, their sense of who they are, and their relationships with others (Davidson, 2011).

In other words, self-authorship links the complexity of the learning experience, such as reflective thinking, intellectual independence and interdependent relationships, with others types of experiences. This theory informs my analysis of the data in both education and social media as they represent different types of authorities (educational, social, and political).

Considerable research has been conducted on the theory of self-authorship. These studies, though not always different to Magolda's views, highlighted two main limitations of the theory. Firstly, due to Magolda's focus on higher education, most of the related studies on self-authorship (such as coping with conflicts (Pizzolato, 2004) or the influence of ethnic identity (Torres, 2007) similarly focused on college students rather than students in elementary and high schools, despite the issue of self-authorship being equally critical in a child's formative years – if not more. For instance, in her paper on the elements of self-authorship, Magolda focussed on a group of participants in their thirties and the effect of their development of an internal voice relative to the struggles faced in adult life (Magolda, 2008). Secondly, all of the studies that use Magolda's theory are limited in their understanding or exploration of the necessary contexts of learning for students from a constructive developmental

pedagogic standpoint (Magolda, 1999). For instance, a study on learning styles and learning spaces (Kolb and Kolb, 2005) viewed authority as an educational authority only, excluding other factors such as the social and cultural context. Similarly, Wawrzynski and Pizzolato (2006) focussed on investigating the relationship between students' academic path and self-authorship.

On the other hand, most of the aforementioned studies (such as Pizzolato's study (2006) argued that the importance of self-authorship in education cannot be ignored. For instance, in one of her works, Magolda stresses the point that students' transformation extends beyond developing cognitive skills in education: the interplay of one's view of knowledge (epistemological development), view of self (intrapersonal development), discussed in the "private self", and view of social relations (interpersonal development) discussed in the "public self" are clearly articulated in research, recounting young adults' transformation from external definition to self-authorship (Magolda 2001; Kegan 1994; Magolda and King, 2003).

Moreover, students initially viewed knowledge as a way for authority figures to enforce their power. They do not see themselves as having intellectual independence in constructing knowledge, and their desire in acquiring others' approval often limits their skills in questioning different perspectives. This ideology is very significant for an analysis of the dynamics between external authorities in the school environment and the participating students' self-authorship. It also contributes in the attempt of this thesis to recreate a process of learning and intellectual development towards self-authorship as a necessary step towards building individuality (Magolda 2001; Kegan 1994; Magolda and King, 2003).

Magolda's theory and way of analysis form one of the central and underlying concepts upon which this study is based. In spite of the criticisms and the focus of related studies on self-authorship, this thesis strongly advocates that the result of the development of meaning and definitions of the self start at an early age. Magolda's theory could contribute to an analysis in an educational setting with participants from a younger age group. Unexpectedly, it also contributes to the attempt of the analysis of the political and social context, as presented in the "authority" theme, with participants from the platform of Twitter.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter was concerned with providing a coherent theoretical framework for the study presented in this thesis. As a departure point, this was an understanding of human development revolving around two main concepts: individualism and gendered identity. The research at the first level of individuality definition uses the theory of individualism/collectivism in order to better understand the different types of individualism/collectivism and to establish a good understanding of individuality in relation to the society. This definition of individuality allows this research to explore the topic in religious, cultural and sociological contexts. Indeed, given the socio-cultural and socio-religious significance of gender issues in Saudi Arabia, the act of defining individuality has led to the development of central concept of this framework "gendered identity".

The main pillar of this framework is the concept of gendered identity, explored in terms of "gender" and "identity" and used to uncover its characteristics in relation to Saudi females. Hence, it was positioned within two fields, feminism and psychology.

For the feminist approach, theories of "gender" within the context of Islam, needed to be reviewed in this chapter. This study focuses on the status of women in a Muslim country and thus makes an in-depth understanding of the matter necessary in the interest of avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the data due to cultural and sociological biases.

Additionally, since this study examines the influence of the religious curriculum with the specific intent of understanding the construction of Saudi women's sense of individuality, Islamic theories of feminism are well suited to this work as they provide a religious framework necessary to an insightful understanding of Saudi women's individuality.

As mentioned earlier, the psychological approach to identity in this chapter was driven by the psycho-cultural theory of individualism/collectivism. It is outlined by the intersectional understanding of identity in psychology literature as the (private self) and the (public self), highlighting Magolda's theory of self-authorship.

Magolda's theory of self-authorship becomes critical in the analytical process of this research as it offers the best suited way to understand the last stage of the development of individualism among females, and, to some extent, is the outcome of the type of identity and perceptions shaped by the two environments. Since part of the

current study examines how education shapes the development of the individual, the definition of self in relation to others is extremely relevant. It provides a comprehensive view and method for the understanding of the psychological influence of authorities on the development of individuality among females.

Now that the paper has described in detail the theoretical framework of this study, the following section presents the methodology as it is determinant in defining the accuracy of the results on which the analysis is based. The next chapter will thus explain the procedure utilized for data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS & METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a description of the research methodologies used in the study. The study and associated methodology were designed to appreciate the current nature of female individuality in an Islamic society and its relation to the increasingly common use of social platforms such as Twitter. Also the methodology was developed to explore the contrast between the virtual and the physical environment and its effect on the proposed main facets of individuality. This is done in the study with reference to the impact of school education and its "Islamic curriculum" on Saudi females.

Mass communication research is fairly new among scientific studies dated early-20th-century and is concerned with effects of persuasive messages (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 2014). In addition to scholars in the fields of mass communication, researchers from disciplines such as sociology and psychology have dedicated their studies to analysing mass communication processes and effects, thus contributing their own theoretical perspectives and research methods (Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 2014). Regardless of whether they were optimistic, pessimistic, certain, or uncertain about mass communication's effects, researchers have often recognized content analysis as an essential step in understanding those effects (Riffe, Lacy, Fico, 2014). Quantitative method is much more popular than qualitative method among media researchers in the Arab world, where previous studies on Arab media audiences were quantitative

(Sakr, 2007), basing their arguments only on figures, percentages and questionnaire surveys.

However, adopting a quantitative method in this study without considering a qualitative method would not provide in-depth data or clear information in illustrating female individuality, which needs to be analysed within the realm of this thesis. This research is consequently, anchored on both qualitative – semi-structured interviews, observational notes – and quantitative – questionnaire surveys (measurement tools). The aim behind using mixed methods was to draw, as vivid as possible a picture of the experiences of the Saudi woman in the development of their individuality within the Saudi society and to provide a richer knowledge of the subject matter and Twitter's effect on it. The measurement tool survey will measure the horizontal/vertical level of individuality among Saudi females (i.e. with regards to their relationship with authoritative figures and their peers respectively), while semi-structured interviews will provide data on the causes explaining the potential impact, if any, of the social media platform "Twitter" (Branthwaite and Patterson, 2011) which shows the extent to which women explore and develop their individuality. The present study underwent three stages; the quantitative method as the first stage, and two different approaches of qualitative research for the second and third stage.

In regards to the quantitative method (measurement tool survey) used in this research, it is applied to measure the levels of horizontal and vertical individualism in contrast to collectivism both, before and after the introduction of Twitter. This tool was used with participants from both environments in the early stage of the data collection. It has been treated as an indicator to present a variety of levels of individuality between

the physical and virtual. It may be noted here that using this measurement tool in Saudi Arabia to measure female individuality is uncommon and none of the studies related to social media in Saudi Arabia have considered it so far. As such, the use of this tool in a social media study represents a new research method to measure female individuality in the Saudi context, and thus attempts to provide new insight into the matter.

Concerning the qualitative approaches of research, it is essential to know that there are varieties of ways in which qualitative research can be executed in any piece of research of this kind, especially within the context of a country like Saudi Arabia. The second and the third stage undertook two different approaches of qualitative research. The second stage includes semi-structured interviews and observational notes obtained in the field and were used in order to aptly illustrate and exemplify the formation of female individuality, in the physical environment. This stage aims to contribute materials to clarify the context and also provide a basis for an analysis, to comprehend the effect of Twitter's "virtual environment" on female individuality. The third stage makes use of the semi-structured interviews as a central method to understand the dynamics of female individuality within the second context, *i.e.* that of "Twitter".

The following section discusses research design in further details, and the rationale for the strategic choices in this research regarding method.

4.2 Research Design

The present study aims to investigate the impact of Twitter on Saudi female users, by adoption of mixed method techniques. These techniques were used in the context of a mixed method research approach, where both quantitative and qualitative techniques were combined to provide a better understanding of the data collected from participants.

It should be clear that this thesis heavily relied on qualitative research, where quantitative data was only used as a departure point for this study. Data was collected in two different types of environment that have deep and diverse influences on female individuality. Data were overall largely related to the ways in which Saudi women define themselves in the virtual environment of Twitter, and its unique dynamics of communication in relation to gender. Other areas of investigation included access to and availability of information in relation to religious thoughts on women, attitudes of users' towards access to and availability of new information, and finally, the segregation of influencing impact of Twitter in categories of political authority, the religious authority and the individual authority.

Bryman (1988) argues that quantitative and qualitative approaches should be combined. The approaches can be combined at different stages of the research process, which include the formulation of research questions, sampling, data collection and data analysis. This combination enables the researcher to gain access to different types of knowledge. Therefore, this study collected data first through surveys. These offered a general overview of the different levels of individuality between the two environments of physical and virtual realities. Lastly, in order to

answer more directly the questions guiding this research, the data collection was completed with observational notes and semi-structured interviews in later stages.

Since this study bases much of its observations on a wide range of ideas and concepts, such as the adoption of Islamic feminism, gendered identity and self-authorship, the methodology was designed in order to allow an exploration of the data in the light of all these theories. For instance, one focus of this study is on the question - whether or not the open access to information (Twitter) in the cases of different schools of thoughts, and the understanding of women in Islam can transform an individual's beliefs and behaviours towards the traditional curriculum (specific school of thought). Therefore, this study reviewed theories related to these subjects and built them into the framework of this research methodology, in order to answer the research questions, set out in the introduction. This afore-mentioned logic of the research method must however be analysed, as it has some uncertainties that need to be addressed. This is the aim of the next section.

4.2.1 Rationale of Research Design

Bryman (2006) in his article "Integrating quantitative and qualitative research", highlighted that some methodologists might argue that a combination of quantitative and qualitative data based on the administration of one research instrument does not represent a true integration of quantitative and qualitative research since one will unavoidably end up subordinating the other. However, Maxwell and Loomis (2003) argued, "uncovering the actual integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches in any particular study is a considerably more complex undertaking than simply

classifying the study into a particular category on the basis of a few broad dimensions or characteristics" (p.241)

In coding the justifications for combining quantitative and qualitative research, two different schemes were employed. First, the influential scheme devised, in the context of evaluation research by Greene and his colleagues (1989). This scheme isolates five justifications for combining quantitative and qualitative research:

1. Triangulation: "convergence, corroboration, correspondence or results from different methods. In coding triangulation, the emphasis was placed on seeking corroboration between quantitative and qualitative data" (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989, p.259)

2. Complementarity: "seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another" (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989, p.259)

3. Development: "seeks to use the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method, where development is broadly construed to include sampling and implementation, as well as measurement decisions" (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989, p.259)

4. Initiation: "seeks the discovery of paradox and contradiction, new perspectives of [sic] frameworks, the recasting of questions or results from one method with questions or results from the other method" (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989, p.259)

5. Expansion: "seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components" (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989, p.259)

Now that the tools for better understanding the research method have been developed, the following section discusses the application of these methods to better appreciate the integration of different methods.

4.2.2 Survey Method

First of all, the first stage of research can be described as a quantitative questionnaire method to illustrate a general understanding of the level of individuality in participants, born of the educational and social media environments.

Questionnaires are beneficial and valuable tools when seeking information about what people think, and their beliefs or their explanations for their attitudes and individual perceptions (Coolican, 1996). In this research, it is beneficial to give a sense of measurement and affirmation of the differences between the real world and the virtual world, in their influences on individuality.

The following section, discusses the logic and rationale behind the choice of the survey method.

4.2.3 Rationale of the Survey Method

The main aim in explaining the use of the survey method in the current study is to gather data from a large amount of Saudi female students at primary, elementary and university education levels, about their level of individuality. It was planned that this

method would enable the research to establish a link between the levels of female individuality in both the physical and virtual environments. This would then allow for an exploration and outlining of a general overview of the predicted differences in the level of individuality between the two environments. This quantitative approach (measurement tool) was also used to facilitate assessment, by producing stable and consistent results among participants despite differing biographies and research settings.

Despite of the advantages and the strengths of the survey as a methodological tool, there are of course some drawbacks to using this survey method. Data provided by surveys run the risk of being criticized as vague (Neuman, 2005). To avoid this pitfall and allow for a higher level of accuracy and consistency about the subject matter being investigated, this research employs quantitative data as a simple blueprint and foundation on which to build upon with a qualitative method later on (Creswell, 2013).

4.2.4 Observational Analysis Method

Observational analysis involves watching, listening, monitoring and in some cases interacting with the users to determine the way in which they carry out tasks. Observational analysis can take place in a controlled environment, as with usability testing, or in a more natural environment, *i.e.* on the ground (Tiresias, 2009). Utts (2012) proposed that an observational study can draw inferences about the possible effect of a treatment on subjects, especially in situations where the assignment of subjects into a treated group versus a control group is outside the control of the investigator.

Observational notes from the Islamic Studies classes were also collected to augment the interview data. These observational field notes captured the participants' daily behaviours inside the school, the interactions between teachers and students in classrooms and the teachers' use of the curriculum material such as the textbook. It also captured the students' behaviours during lessons and outside the classrooms, their questions and arguments, as well as their body languages. The number of students in each classroom was between 25-30 students and observations were conducted in 60 lessons of religious subjects taught in the Islamic curriculum in Twheed, Fiqh[10], Qura'an and Hadeeth. Observational analysis of the textbook has been considered as supporting data, given that textbooks are the main sources of information in Islamic studies.

Again, it seems important to now explore the specific logic and rationale employed in the context of this observational analysis.

4.2.5 Rationale of Observational Analysis Methods

Observational analysis and methods of research may differ gravely from quantitative studies but as argued earlier, they are undeniably useful to any piece of research seeking to acquire a broad and deep understanding of a subject such as female individuality in Saudi Arabia.

In the current study, choice was made to employ observational analysis methods for three main reasons. *First of all*, to avoid randomized experiment attempting to

[10]Fiqh: "a system of rules and methods whose authors consider it to be the normative interpretation of the revelation, the application of its principles and commands to the field of human acts" (Johansen, 1999, p.1)

provide information from the actual Saudi Arabia. *Second of all*, the use of such a method would help in the formulation of hypothesis to be investigated in the semi-structured interviews. *Lastly*, this method allows for an observation of accurate and genuine multi-dimensional data from participants' attitudes, opinions and behaviours through body language, physical reactions, voice tones and face expressions. This brings to research, many additional layers of communication, beyond what can be expressed in words. Notably, in a situation in which the participants' range of verbal reactions is limited, for example due to the presence of the teacher as a figure of authority, body language can express some feelings that the participant cannot voice. As such, a broader range of feelings and reactions can be detected thanks to real life cues.

Another method employed was that of semi-structure interviews, which is presented in the upcoming subsection.

4.2.6 Semi-structured Interviews

Barriball and While (1994) argued that semi-structured interviews are well-suited means for data collection based on two primary considerations. *First of all,* they are very appropriate for the exploration of the respondents' perceptions and opinions regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues. Additionally, they enable probing for more information and clarification of answers. *Secondly,* the varied professional, educational and personal histories of the sample group precluded the use of a standardized interview schedule (Barriball and While, 1994). Similarly, the research uses semi-structured interview method for two similar primary reasons; *firstly,* because the research will be brought to explore religious and political perceptions and

opinions of Saudi females regarding their individualism which is a complex and sensitive issue. *The second reason* comes from the varied personal issues regarding the family background and social classes of participants in this study, whose complexities would have eluded a standardized interview schedule, as was mentioned by Barriball and While (1994).

However, it must be acknowledged that there are several limitations to using semi-structured interviews. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, *first of all,* not all participants can easily provide an open, free opinion without taking into consideration the social, political and religious authorities when being interviewed (Drever, 1995). Additionally, the participants share the same school educational background and, their number being too few, the data does not allow for a generalization of findings to the larger population of Saudi Arabia as a whole, unified and generalized entity. Because of this uncertainty, it is not appropriate to treat the findings in education from semi-structured interviews, with the same degree of confidence one would have in findings derived from measurement tool surveys and personal observational notes. Nevertheless, the semi-structured interviews provide valuable insights into Saudi women' experiences. Generally speaking, the next section provides a solid reasoning behind the use of semi-structured interviews.

4.2.7 Rationale of Using Semi-Structured Interviews

The main purpose of using semi-structured interviews is to insure a wider profusion of data by allowing the interpretation of diverse meanings of the language used by the female participants on their experience in using Twitter, and to permit the collection of data that cannot be collected in a formal questionnaire.

As Denzin (1989) puts it, in this type of interview, "clearly, validity and reliability depend, not upon the repeated use of the same words in each question, but rather upon conveying equivalence of meaning" (Denzin, 1989; Barriball & While, 1994, p.330) "It is this equivalence of meaning, which helps to standardize the semi-structured interview and facilitate comparability" (Barriball & While, 1994, p.330). Furthermore, this method can deal with the sensitivity of the issues tackled more practically, in regards of collecting triangulated complex data, and it can introduce subjectivity into the interpretation of the data and provide richer insights to the participants' attitudes and values than survey research alone can achieve (Silverman, 2013). For instance, Bridget Byrne (2004) follows the logic of her study in recommending open ended interviews to overcome the inadequacies of survey research. As she puts it: "(qualitative interviewing) when done well is able to achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other, particularly survey-based, approaches". (p.209).

The decision to use semi-structured interviews as the second step in a series of qualitative and quantitative stages was made following a consideration that the method would be helpful in gathering reflective data after gathering an overview or, in other words, outlined (abstract) findings to the research questions (Silverman, 2013). The aim here is to measure the level of individuality, by looking at the nature of environment, nature of communication, the quality of information and to examine participants' attitudes towards authorities. Thus, semi-structured interviews are used to complete the findings, describe and explore more aspects and factors in forming and transforming participants' beliefs and behaviours.

Another key element to mention in this journey through the methods of research utilized in this research is the critical choice of location and setting.

4.3 Location and Setting

This research deals with two types of environment, namely the physical and the virtual environment. To be accurate, one could say that the current study takes into consideration only one physical location but several environments, one of it being a virtual environment.

The study location was in Saudi Arabia, more specifically Jeddah. It is the second largest state in the Arab world after Algeria with a land area of approximately 2,150,000 km^2 (830,000 sq. mi). It is impossible to cover all Saudi cities in this investigation; hence there was a need to narrow down the geographical scope of this research to maximize its coherence. There are several reasons that led to this choice of location. *First of all,* the variety of socio-historical backgrounds within the society in Jeddah is much higher than in other major Saudi cities, such as the capital, Riyadh. Secondly, it is the largest city in Saudi Arabia after the capital. The geographical importance of Jeddah is significant, as it is the nearest large city to the two main holy mosques, "Alharam Alnabawi" mosque in Al-Madina city, and "Alharam Almaqqi" Mosque in Makkah city. Moreover, Jeddah is regarded as the most liberal region in Saudi Arabia (Altorki, 1986), with a higher level of individual freedom than anywhere else. In fact, some Saudis call it "The Saudi Las Vegas", referring to the high level of freedom, which makes it the most encouraging environment within the country for the development of female individuality. Most importantly, as presented in the literature review, the first private girls' school was based in the city of Jeddah.

Research on the individual and the development of individuality would not be complete without a focus on the learning experience provided by schools and the educational system, as students are mostly shaped, in their formative years, by these institutions (Ching and Foley, 2012). This is why the physical environment (school) was the starting point of the research analysis, as is reflected in the structure of analysis chapters in section II. If one adopts from a learning perspective that puts forward the idea that education institutions are part of the community, then education and community identification are fundamentally linked (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wanger, 1998; Ching and Foley, 2012). On the other hand, the platform of Twitter, as a significant player in Saudi society nowadays, was chosen as the second environment to understand its influence on gendered identity, in order to understand the development of Saudi female individuality soundly. Goffman (1959) argues that in studying identity "we must examine not only individuals and their learning but also the social and cultural contexts, practices, and technologies, digital or otherwise, the shape and are shaped by the development of selves." (Goffman, 1959; Holland Lachiotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2001; Ching & Foley, 2012 p.3). Therefore, the study covers two different types of environment; the physical environment of the school in Jeddah city, and the influential virtual environment provided by the social media platform, Twitter.

4.3.1 The Physical Environment

The first setting of the qualitative research, the physical one, took place at a private girls' school in Jeddah. Given that this study required the researcher to be personally present in classrooms and have direct contact with the participants, I had two rather

broad conditions for choosing a specific school to observe: *firstly,* it had to be a 'private school' given that private schools in Saudi Arabia are well known for the high quality of education which they offer, and are supposedly far superior to state schools in terms of quality education. In addition, private school teachers and principals exhibited more enthusiasm about the research than the principals and educational teams that were contacted in public schools. This difference was quite evident, despite of the fact that both types of schools are teaching the same national curriculum, which also stipulates required textbooks. Also, the teachers in both private and public schools are most often alumni of the very same institutions. Most of the time, they themselves come from a similar educational experience in Jeddah as the one they were providing to their students. *Second of all,* it had to be an all-girls school, quite simply due to the practical fact that there are no mix-gendered schools in Saudi Arabia, and that the scope of this research examines female, rather than male, individuality.

I proceeded by contacting several private schools formally and informally and conversing with the school principals about the aims and goals of the research (see appendix D). Four schools initially indicated their willingness to participate. One of the schools expressed strong concerns about the school's confidentiality and a certain lack of confidence to provide access to their facilities to researchers and allow them to expose its education quality. However, due to the time constraints and the purpose of this study, it was eventually decided to focus on working with one school only. The school is considered to be one of the best private schools in the city with a total of seven hundred students from preschool through to high school.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3 below, eight Islamic teacher studies, 100 Elementary / Intermediate-level students (10-13 years old), and 100 high school-level students (14-17 years old) participated in the study. Given the sensitive focus of the research, I had previously agreed with the teachers and the students' legal guardians that participation would be on a voluntary basis and that their personal information, including their names, would be kept confidential (see appendix D).

In addition to this physical setting and for the purposes of this research on the impact of social media, a virtual environment was also selected, which is discussed in the following section.

4.3.2 The Virtual Environment

The second setting of the qualitative research took place in a virtual environment; all the while attempting to retain participants from the same city, as used in the educational setting, in the interest of consistency and more accurate results. Participants in the virtual environment setting were also taught the same curriculum examined in the educational environment. Similarly, all had then been exposed to the virtual environment of Twitter at a later date. The selection of those participants raised various questions in regard to sampling and sample size, which are presented below.

4.4 Participants Sampling and Sample Size

Pragmatically and realistically, there is unfortunately not enough time, fund, equipment, and access to suitable sites, to examine and study each single individual. Two main reasons are here particularly crucial: *first of all*, as a female researcher with

challenges regarding mobility and access to certain sites in the country, I could not be present at all the necessary locations. *Second of all,* it is not appropriate to study the entire population in both genders when the subject of the study mainly tackles issues regarding female individuality. An approach including both genders was at first considered, before being dropped as access to a boys' school for a female researcher was highly unlikely. Moreover, the complexity of the collected data would have extended beyond the length allowed in this study. Thus, one gender was chosen and a sample was selected as a subset of the relevant population.

The present study conducted interviews that included women from both the physical and the virtual environments. While children and youth were the focus of this research, participants were mainly school students (Group A&B) and Twitter users (Group D), the latter being college students or recent college graduates. Also, eight teachers and three school principals (Group C) were included in order to provide an important dimension to the data on the school environment. This approach proves to be a valid one, as "an age-cohort commonality is not what defines a developmental approach. In fact, that would be a poor distinction" (Ching & Foley, 2012, p.5).

The following section presents the variety of participants that were interviewed to collect data within the physical environment.

4.4.1 The Physical Environment (setting 1):

Student	Quantity	Education level	Age
Group A	100	Elementary- Intermediate	10-13
Group B	100	High-school	14-17

Table 2 Participants (Group A & B)

Profile of school students who participated in the study

Students participating in this study were elementary, intermediate and high school female students, who came from the middle class society of Jeddah. They all were users of digital media with access to internet at their homes. Most of them were exposed to other cultures through travel, television and most importantly, through social media. They were very flexible and willing to participate in this research.

In addition, the Islamic studies teachers in the school varied across a variety of ages, levels of experience, and educational and social backgrounds. Five of them had degrees in Islamic studies, while two of them had an educational background in Business and Mathematics, and one of the teachers with the most years of experience did not, in fact, possess a college degree at all. Although all of them taught the same subject, they did not share the same teaching objectives, three of them aimed to be teachers for personal motivations, some of them taught only for the sake of having employment. For example, the teacher with the MIS degree in business chose to be a teacher in Islamic studies because she believed that being a teacher was easier than

being an employee in a bank. She stated, "If I were to work in a bank, I would be dealing with long working hours and more important responsibilities than with children!"

Teacher	Education	Major	Years of Experience
Teacher 1	KAAU[11]	BA Islamic Studies	6
Teacher 2	KAAU	B.Sc. Mathematics	4.5
Teacher 3	KAAU	B.Sc. Business, Finance	5
Teacher 4	Damascus	BA Islamic Studies	7
Teacher 5	KAAU	BA Islamic Studies	3
Teacher 6	Dar AlHanan School	High-school Degree	11
Teacher 7	KAAU	BA Islamic Studies	4
Teacher 8	KAAU	BA Islamic Studies	4
School Principal 1	KAAU		15
School Principal 2	KAAU		7

[11] (KAAU): King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah

School Principal 3	American University in Beirut		24

Table 3 Participants (Group C)

Profile of school teachers who participated in the study

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the participating teachers and students. This leads to the presentation of study sample of participants in the second setting, which is the virtual environment.

4.4.2 The Virtual Environment (setting 2):

The selection of participants was made from (not limited to) my personal network. It comprised of women who, due to their activities, were interested in possessing a better understanding of the topic to be explored. These women were Saudis living within Saudi society and who had studied the Islamic curriculum at Saudi schools. Although they came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, most had very dissimilar lifestyles. 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Saudi women:

Code	Name	Age	Higher Education	Religious Point of View (at the time of interview)	Current City
1	Marwa	19	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
2	Ruba	20	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA

Code	Name	Age	Higher Education	Religious Point of View (at the time of interview)	Current City
3	Fajr	20	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
4	Maryam	20	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
5	Razan	21	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
6	Sara	21	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
7	Ameera	21	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
8	Amal	21	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
9	Alya	21	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
10	Jumana	22	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
11	Dalia	22	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
12	Reem	23	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
13	Hala	23	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
14	Wed	23	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
15	Nora	23	DAH Private College / Student	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
16	Sultana	24	Abdul-Aziz University / Grad.	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
17	Abeer	27	Abdul-Aziz University / Grad.	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
18	Hanan	28	Abdul-Aziz University / Grad.	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
19	Hamsa	28	Abdul-Aziz University / Grad.	Liberal	Jeddah, KSA
20	Lama	27	Royal Holloway College, UK / PHD Student	Liberal	London, UK
21	Iana	25	SOAS University, UK / Grad.	Liberal	Dubai, UAE
22	Ghada	25	SOAS University, UK / Grad.	Liberal	Dubai, UAE
23	Maha	19	Leeds University, UK / Student	Liberal	Leeds, UK
24	Afnan	29	Imperial College, UK / Grad.	Conservative	Jeddah, KSA

Code	Name	Age	Higher Education	Religious Point of View (at the time of interview)	Current City
25	Salma	27	American University of Dubai / Grad.	Liberal	Dubai, UAE

Table 4 Participants (Group D)

Profile of Saudi females who participated in the study

The number of interviews was decided on the basis of four factors:

1. With the qualitative and quantitative data sources already used; the semi-structured interviews were viewed as a way of supplementing other data collection. Only 25 interviews were therefore required.

2. Owing to the range of viewpoints represented in the study; these interviews were a way of capturing perceptions and new perspectives on the studied subject to better cover concerns relating to the appropriate and accurate understanding of the resources found in setting 1 (Physical environment) and relating them in the analysis.

3. Due to the available time and resources at least one week was needed to prepare, conduct, transcribe and analyse one semi-structured interview. As a Ph.D. student my time was already considerably consumed by the related activities of drafting up the wider research. Thus, the number of interviews scheduled had to take into

account available time and resources, as well as the availability and flexibility of the participants.

4. With reference to the issues of data saturation; data collection from participants was terminated once data saturation was achieved, *i.e.* when interviews stopped providing any new or additional insights and were simply becoming repetitive.

This brings us to the issue of data collection and the ways in which data were analysed for the purpose of this research.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis

4.5.1 Survey

Questionnaires rooted in a quantitative approach to research and analysis, were designed based on the concept of individuality in general. It was conducted in an early stage of the data collection in both settings. As explained in section 4.3 of this chapter, these settings as mentioned throughout the thesis were divided into two types of spaces - the physical and the virtual settings.

4.5.1.1 Questionnaire design and measurements

This questionnaire was conducted on participants from both environments to draw an overall picture of the development of vertical and horizontal individualism, and to highlight the expected different results in this measurement tool considering the environment as the main variable.

The survey used, follows the "Individualism and Collectivism Scale", also known as the Culture Orientation Scale. This is derived from Triandis' & Gelfland's measurement tool (1998). Hofstede argued that there are four major dimensions that can be used to classify societies according to their cultural attributes; collectivism-individualism, power-distance, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty-avoidance. In most academic fields, there is a nearly-unanimous consensus that the most important of these was the first, and it has generated a plethora of research studies (Shulruf, Hattie & Dixon, 2003). As such, the research questionnaire mainly focused on the analysis of vertical/horizontal individualism/collectivism. The questionnaire design, its scoring as well as the data collected are all fully displayed in Appendix A.

4.5.2 Observational Analysis

A phenomenological approach in data analysis was chosen for the observational analysis in the physical environment. This approach includes two different methods of observational notes on participants and semi-structured interviews.

The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to highlight specific phenomena and identify them through the ways in which the actors involved in the situations observed and perceived them. "This normally translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews and discussions with participants" (Lester, 1999, p.1). A more simplistic definition of phenomenology is offered by Grbich, who states that "phenomenology constitutes an approach to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these meanings" (Grbich, 2007; kafle, 2013, p.183). Max van Manen (1990), another eminent scholar in the field, considers

phenomenology as the most suitable method to investigate the phenomena of pedagogical significance.

Jamjoom (2010) in her study exploring "what does it mean to be an Islamic studies teacher in Saudi Arabia" used phenomenology as a guiding theoretical framework. Lester (1999) argues that recent humanist and feminist researchers emphasise the importance of the researcher in the frame of the research, to be seen as a subjective actor rather than a detached observer (Plummer 1983, Stanley & Wise 1993; Lester, 1999, p.1). As a result, a technique in phenomenological data analysis, known as "hermeneutic", was then developed, in which significant statements and quotations relevant to the topic were listed in one document and given equal value. Those statements and quotations were then tested on account of two requirements: whether they contained a unique moment of experience related to the phenomena under study and whether it was possible to label them as independent themes or meaningful units (Moustakas, 1994). Statements were then clustered into themes such that each theme illustrated a particular meaning or experience.

According to Kafle (2013, p. 191), the hermeneutic technique does not have a step-by-step instructions or specific analytic guidance. Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) explained that hermeneutic method uses 'thick description', 'paradigm cases', and 'thematic analysis' to explore meanings and ways of being (practices) that may be taken for granted in our lives.

4.5.2.1 Rationale of the Phenomenological Approach

The most powerful rationale for the phenomenological approach was given by Lester in 1999, stating that "phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual. It pushes for a 'bracketing' of "taken for granted" assumptions and usual ways of perceiving the world that are in fact anchored in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity" (Lester, 1999, p2). Hence, this is a powerful approach for understanding the participants' motivations and behaviours. Therefore, as a Saudi female and an insider researcher with subjective experience and potential assumptions about the subject of research, it was decided that this phenomenological approach would be the appropriate approach for the educational setting of this research.

However, there are some drawbacks for the phenomenological approach, which must be examined before diving in headfirst into this methodology's rationale. The challenge of the phenomenological approach is that it collects a large quantity of data that needs to be analysed. "Analysis is necessarily messy, as data doesn't tend to fall into neat categories" (Lester, 1999, p2). Thus, such studies inherently suffer from issues relating to a large amount of unorganized or subjectively categorized data. Notes collected by using this method are challenging in the analytical stage since they involve a herculean amount of work to perfectly identify key themes, link different information together and structure the findings. Once the links and structure of information have been made explicit, this method is a source of deep, rich and new contributions to the subject matter. It also leads to rich triangulated arguments, but such difficulties, as explained above, render the method difficult to access and to practice, especially for individuals seeking to apply it correctly.

Finally, the "phenomenological approach is good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard" (Lester, 1999, p.4). In the context of this research, this method has highlighted deep issues, some of which were subliminal, and presented as "taken for granted" assumptions, or even as socially common knowledge. As a result, this method has succeeded in showing that these issues are relevant to the research in a more conscious, organised and meaningful manner. This is especially important for this research, which seeks to give a voice to female students to explore their individuality. As a matter of comparison, this research does not want to draw any parallel similarities to the type of research conducted by Al-Rasheed(2013), in which, as previously argued in the theoretical framework, not enough space was given to the participants of the study as opposed to the theories of the authors and their expected observations. On the other hand, this research is aimed at unearthing the specificities of Saudi female individuality by noting the testimonies and answers of average, everyday Saudi women. And draw observations from there, rather than the other way around. Consequently, the phenomenological approach is the most suitable to achieve the research goals.

4.5.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

The theoretical framework and the literature review participated in defining the key differences between Twitter and the real world; the nature of environment, the nature of information and communication and the dynamics of authorities. Hence, the interview questions were designed based on these differences. In addition, in this study, female individuality in the virtual world is explored based on the analysis of

the physical environment. Therefore, the interviews revolved around the main themes of the analysis of the physical setting; identity, perceptions and authority.

A detailed guide on these interviews, including their nature and the questions asked, can be found in Appendix G.

4.5.4 Organizing the data

As mentioned earlier, scores for the quantitative surveys in both settings were calculated. These scores contributed in highlighting the differences in the vertical/horizontal level of individualism among participants from both settings. They also acted as supporting quantitative data to the main hypothesis of the research. In addition, the results influenced the tone of the semi-interview questions used in both settings.

From such results, more specific research questions were developed. An observational analysis was chosen in order to collect more specific data contributing to the development of specific research questions in a phenomenological approach, followed by reflective interviews with teachers and students. Interviews that contributed to the observational notes were transcribed. Both interviews and observational notes were very valuable to the flow of the research, as well as the analysis in the following chapters.

4.6 Ethical issues

I was aware of the many ethical issues relevant to research when dealing with human subjects, especially in Saudi Arabia. These relate to different areas of the research, such as reviewing the literature, accessing certain institutions, the methods used to obtain data, and acting meaningfully while aware of the sensitive nature of some of the issues relating to participants. The issues are the following:

- To give complete respect for the institutions, (confidentiality) the thesis cannot reveal the name of the institutions accessed, since most of the findings could be sensitive and pose a risk to them. This also ensures complete respect for the data to be analysed free from politico-religious limitations.

- To ensure collecting useful and accurate data, the interviews were conducted in accordance with certain conditions, like, a prior approval of the interviewees was taken, they were informed of the purpose of the research prior to the interviews, confidentiality of their personal data was guaranteed in advance, thus it was necessary to conceal the participants' identities and use fake names when reporting the results.

- A foundation degree in counselling skills was completed before conducting the interviews, in order to succeed in questioning very sensitive issues. This also helped in building trust, understanding body language and voice tones in the observational analysis.

- As a female researcher, religious and cultural issues were taken into consideration to assist in choosing the research setting.

4.7 Translation

All the translation work needed regarding the surveys and interviews were completed by myself. Translation played a large role in the research analysis. However, due to the plethora of data collected and in an effort to save time as well as to avoid misinterpretations of original meaning, data were analysed in Arabic, and only used data were transcribed into English.

SECTION II: ANALYSIS

- **Introduction**

As previously stated, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the impact of new platforms of sociability and social media – namely Twitter – on long-established definitions of Saudi female individuality, throughout the Saudi educational experience. This analytical section is dedicated to the examination of the data gathered during field research in Saudi Arabia, which consisted of observational notes and semi-structured interviews using a phenomenological approach. Data were gathered during the period spanning from September 2012 to January 2013, focusing on three participant groups (A, B and C) as presented in the previous methodology. The purpose of gathering and analysing these data is to provide informative depth and dimension to the findings on individuality necessary to the evaluation of the impact of both the physical environment of Saudi society and the virtual environment of Twitter. The themes are characterized through observational notes and interview data, by coding and labelling statements, events, quotations and texts related to the topic. Each theme highlights a particular meaning or experience, and is divided into sub-themes as emerged from the thematic analysis.

The core themes and the illustrative sub-themes reported here were initially developed individually and treated as individual entities. They were defined after a careful analysis of the body of data. For this reason, although all sub-themes were dealt with separately, during the genesis of process of data analysis, they have been carefully linked together to illustrate the overall conclusion in each key theme, be it identity, perception or authority. This approach allows for greater synthesis, wherein the analysis of each individual part does not obscure the whole. More importantly, this

process by no means denigrates the importance of sub-themes, but rather intrinsically consolidates the links between the key themes in the first three chapters and the key themes in Chapter 9, which looks at the impact of Twitter.

The present section is divided into two subsections. The first section is devoted to the school environment and Saudi society, and the second to Twitter. The reason why I chose the present structure rather than a thematic one that simultaneously compares and contrasts the influences of both the physical and virtual environments is because the latter does not prioritise clarity in practice.

Indeed, certain key elements characteristic of these environments are not equally present in both of them at the same time. For example, the question of the dress code in Saudi society, which plays an immense role in Saudi women's sense of identity, does not occur in the virtual sphere. Hence, it would not have been possible to compare the effects of school education and Twitter simultaneously where there is no real equivalence.

Lastly, the present structure follows a chronological logic, reflected in the age of the participants. The analysis of the physical environment was conducted on participants aged 10 to 17, while the investigation on Twitter was conducted on participants aged 19 to 29. As such, this section tells a continuous story in which the participants' age seeks to reflect roughly their level of development.

This section's opening chapter is an exploration of school textbooks used in Saudi Arabia. This analysis is helpful in understanding exactly what the state-imposed curricula teach and their influence on gendered identity. Moreover, it gives a detailed

account of the messages that must be transmitted to the students, of which Saudi female perceptions are born. Finally, it also defines the authority of the school teaching staff, which the thesis theorises as the external authorities.

As the thesis presents in detail further below, social norms in a restrictive religious state as Saudi Arabia create a highly constraining environment, as is apparent from the voices of Saudi girls (discussed in Chapter 6), which the Saudi women can hardly escape. On the contrary, the relative freedom offered by the virtual platform of Twitter offers greater opportunities for Saudi women to explore the limits of the definition of their own identities. Also, the intertwined impacts of the medium of communication and nature of the access to information shape Saudi women's perceptions.

Most interestingly, the contrasts between Twitter and the physical environment are most striking, leading to radical shifts in traditional perceptions, as the voices of the participants will show in Chapters 7 and 9. Finally, authority is the last factor in the definition of female individuality, and is explored in Chapter 8. It includes the often conflicting relationship between self-authorship and the pressure from external authorities, which is explored both in the physical and in the virtual environments according to Magolda's theory of self-authorship.

Armed with those characteristics and a deeper understanding of the context and nature of a Saudi woman's individuality, the contents of Chapter 9 will then analyse the effects of the introduction of social media, and more specifically Twitter, in Saudi society. It will do so by analysing factors of identity and perceptions as they appear in

the research analysis of Twitter. Significantly, traditional perceptions are transformed in the virtual sphere, which ultimately changes Saudi women's relationship with the real world. This will lead to the consideration of the dynamics of power between different authorities in the virtual space, notably the place of self-authorship within the concept put forward by Magolda and previously discussed in the theoretical framework. Finally, the conclusion may tend towards a discussion of potential gender-friendly social reforms pushed by Saudi women who have been influenced by Twitter.

CHAPTER FIVE: SCHOOL CURRICULUM

5.1 Importance of the School Environment

In the interest of understanding Saudi female individuality and its development, it is essential to first analyse one of the primary sources and factors of this identity, which is education. Environmentally, as mentioned earlier, the school plays a key role in the Saudi woman's education by providing a structured and shared set of reference points around which to build her individuality. It could be argued that schools are more instrumental in the matter than any other source. Indeed, though parents do often play a complementary role in discussing issues raised at school, they rarely offer a fully comprehensive, organized, and inclusive perspective on issues that pertain to the development of individuality during a girl's teenage years. This is especially true in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, despite of the inner coherence of the curriculum, the teachings are deeply affected by a systematic restriction on the sources of information provided to students. As a result, unselected sources are delegitimized and discredited, as they are deemed incompatible with the political, religious, and social inclinations of Saudi policy-makers. This deeply affects Saudi women's moral and intellectual perceptions and the way in which they develop their own individuality and reflect on it. Furthermore, the curriculum dictates the content of school lessons in an equally restrictive way. Because of this and the politico-religious nature of the teachings, teachers are required to instruct and advocate specific behaviours or beliefs regardless of their own beliefs and without any ability to offer context or alternatives. This contradiction between the teachers' lessons and their actions can, as developed

further below, additionally influence the students' sense of identity and the way in which they regard their formative environment.

5.2. Saudi Curriculum: A Selective and Restricted Source of Information

George Bernard Shaw is reported to have said "I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which makes it appeal to every age. I have studied him-the wonderful man-…, he must be called the Saviour of Humanity" (Ahmed, 2010, p.13). The question is what is the main characteristic in the Saudi Islamic curriculum that contradicts such a view?

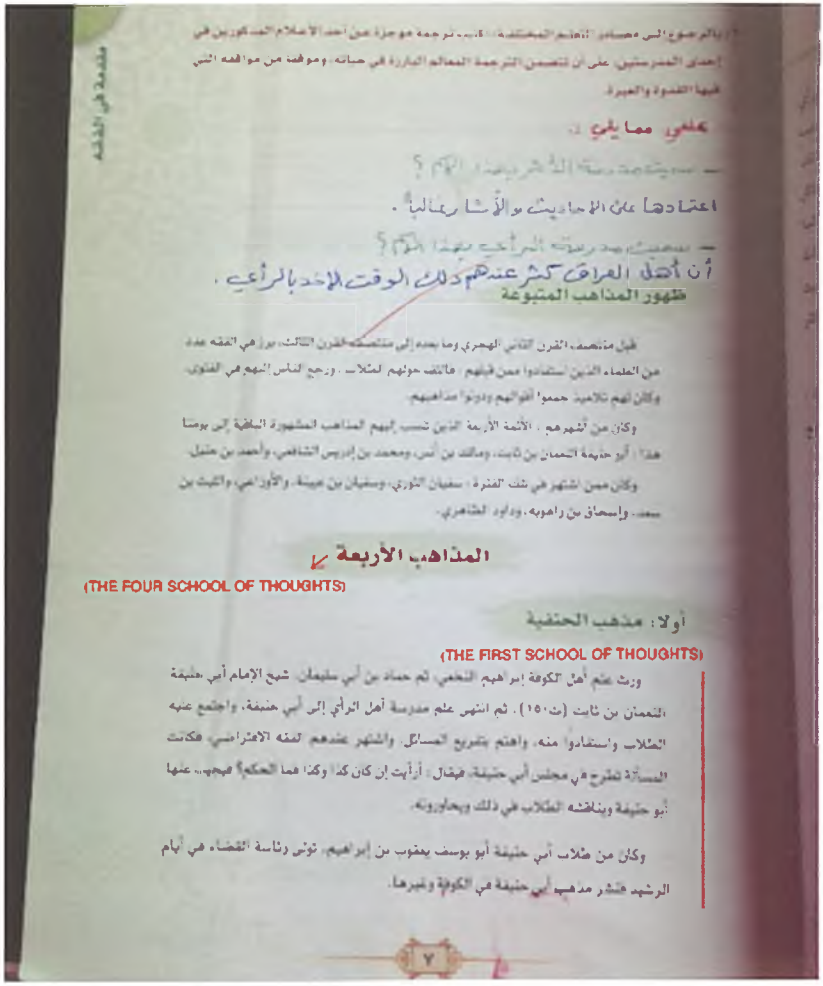
The main characteristic of the traditional Saudi Arabian curriculum is its restriction on the amount and quality of information it carries. In other words, it is a carefully crafted syllabus designed to limit the students' access to information and the credibility of unendorsed, unapproved sources of knowledge and interpretations. Weiss, Knapp and Hollweg (2001) argue that to understand a curriculum as a channel of influence means investigating the resource that provides the information instilled in the curriculum, they state: "exploring what is taught to whom and why involves addressing the implications of a myriad of policy decisions that affect curriculum and resources to support the curriculum" (p.6). In the case of the Saudi Arabian curriculum, this central "resource" can be found in the writings of the Islamic scholar, Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab. He is the only approved Islamic resource in the Islamic curriculum of Saudi schools, especially on the subject of the "Tawheed".

The logic and reasoning behind this limited choice of resources was highlighted in a discussion with a former Professor at one of the main Islamic Universities in the Saudi Arabian Kingdom. The professor voiced the deep appreciation of the scholar among academics. In fact, the scholar's popularity in the academic world is so prevalent that it allows him to republish his works in a variety of modern ways, including in school textbooks. Despite other sources of interpretation and information being presented in the school textbooks, Saudi universities, in the view of this professor, have found them to be far too superficial, as the following paragraphs demonstrate. Those sources were therefore dismissed, and the single interpretation provided by Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab was favoured.

A thorough analysis of the textbook used in this study clearly shows that the four main schools of thought in Islam are presented in the textbook content. However, instead of being presented as valid alternative sources of information useful for the interpretation of Islamic texts and messages, they were treated as part of a single subject taught in the curriculum. In other words, the textbook gave the option to study this limited diversity as an optional addition to the main current of thought, and not as diverging interpretations able to stand individually and be approached separately. Anything contradicting this curriculum and its structure was banned from it.

Figure 4 below shows the table of content for the textbook presenting the four major schools of thought. It shows that they were treated as one of many subjects in the Islamic curriculum, in one specific grade, while the rest of the subjects were based on the only scholar approved by the Ministry of Education. It is almost as though they are presented as insignificant asides rather than as valuable challenges to the main

current of thought. Furthermore, Figure 5 shows that each school of thought has only been introduced in one or two short paragraphs throughout the entire educational experience of female students. Hence, little consideration has truly been granted to other scholars.



علمي مما يلي :

اعتمادها على الأحاديث والآثار غالباً .

أن أهل العراق كثر عندهم ذلك الوقت الأخذ بالرأي .

ظهور المذاهب المتبوعة

قبل منتصف القرن الثاني الهجري وما بعده إلى منتصف القرن الثالث برز في الفقه عدد من العلماء الذين استقلوا عمن قبلهم . فالتف حولهم الطلاب . ورجع الناس إليهم في الفتوى. وكان لهم تلاميذ حملوا أقوالهم ودونوا مذاهبهم.

وكان من أشهرهم . الأئمة الأربعة الذين نسب إليهم المذاهب المشهورة الباقية إلى يومنا هذا : أبو حنيفة النعمان بن ثابت، ومالك بن أنس، ومحمد بن إدريس الشافعي، وأحمد بن حنبل.

وكان ممن اشتهر في تلك الفترة : سفيان الثوري، وسفيان بن عيينة، والأوزاعي، والليث بن سعد، وإسحاق بن راهويه، وداود الظاهري.

المذاهب الأربعة

(THE FOUR SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS)

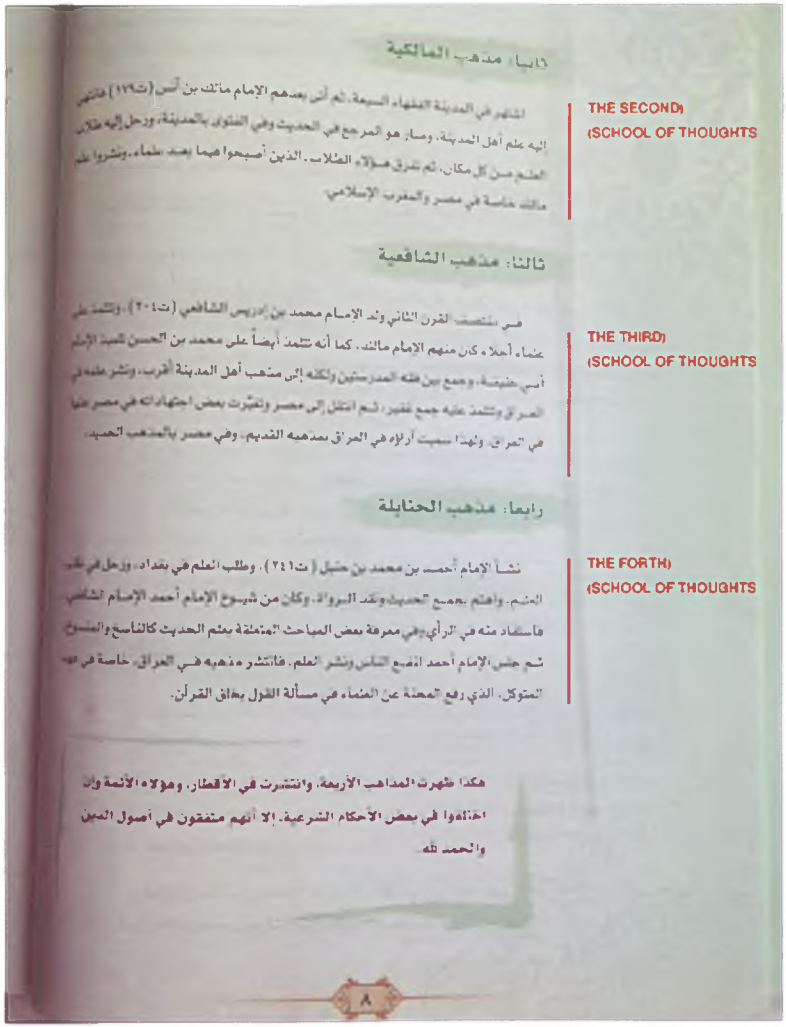
أولا : مذهب الحنفية

(THE FIRST SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS)

ورث علم أهل الكوفة إبراهيم النخعي، ثم حماد بن أبي سليمان. شيخ الإمام أبي حنيفة النعمان بن ثابت (ت١٥٠هـ) . ثم انتهى علم مدرسة أهل الرأي إلى أبي حنيفة، واجتمع عنه الطلاب واستفادوا منه، واهتم بتفريع المسائل. واشتهر عندهم تمثله الافتراضي، فكانت المسألة تطرح في مجلس أبي حنيفة، فيقال : أرأيت إن كان كذا وكذا فما الحكم؟ فيجيب عنها أبو حنيفة ويناقشه الطلاب في ذلك ويحاورونه.

وكان من طلاب أبي حنيفة أبو يوسف يعقوب بن إبراهيم، تولى رئاسة القضاء في أيام الرشيد فنشر مذهب أبي حنيفة في الكوفة وغيرها.

Figure 3 The four main Islamic schools of thoughts in the textbook



ثانيا: مذهب المالكية

THE SECOND)
(SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS

اشتهر في المدينة الفقهاء السبعة، ثم أتى بعدهم الإمام مالك بن أنس (ت١٧٩) فانتهى إليه علم أهل المدينة، وصار هو المرجع في الحديث وفي الفتوى بالمدينة، ورحل إليه طلاب العلم من كل مكان، ثم تفرق هؤلاء الطلاب، الذين أصبحوا فيما بعد علماء، ونشروا علم مالك خاصة في مصر والمغرب الإسلامي.

ثالثا: مذهب الشافعية

THE THIRD)
(SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS

في منتصف القرن الثاني وُلد الإمام محمد بن إدريس الشافعي (ت٢٠٤)، وتتلمذ على علماء أجلاء كان منهم الإمام مالك، كما أنه تتلمذ أيضاً على محمد بن الحسن تلميذ الإمام أبي حنيفة، وجمع بين فقه المدرستين ولكنه إلى مذهب أهل المدينة أقرب، ونشر علمه في العراق وتتلمذ عليه جمع غفير، ثم انتقل إلى مصر وتغيرت بعض اجتهاداته في مصر عنها في العراق، ولهذا سميت آراؤه في العراق بمذهبه القديم، وفي مصر بالمذهب الجديد.

رابعا: مذهب الحنابلة

THE FORTH)
(SCHOOL OF THOUGHTS

نشأ الإمام أحمد بن محمد بن حنبل (ت٢٤١)، وطلب العلم في بغداد، ورحل في طلب العلم، واهتم بجمع الحديث وتعدد الرواة، وكان من شيوخ الإمام أحمد الإمام الشافعي فاستفاد منه في الرأي وفي معرفة بعض المباحث المتعلقة بعلم الحديث كالناسخ والمنسوخ ثم جلس الإمام أحمد لنفع الناس ونشر العلم، فانتشر مذهبه في العراق خاصة في عهد المتوكل، الذي رفع المحنة عن العلماء في مسألة القول بخلق القرآن.

هكذا ظهرت المذاهب الأربعة، وانتشرت في الأقطار، وهؤلاء الأئمة وإن اختلفوا في بعض الأحكام الشرعية، إلا أنهم متفقون في أصول الدين والحمد لله.

٨

Figure 4 Islamic schools of thoughts in the textbook

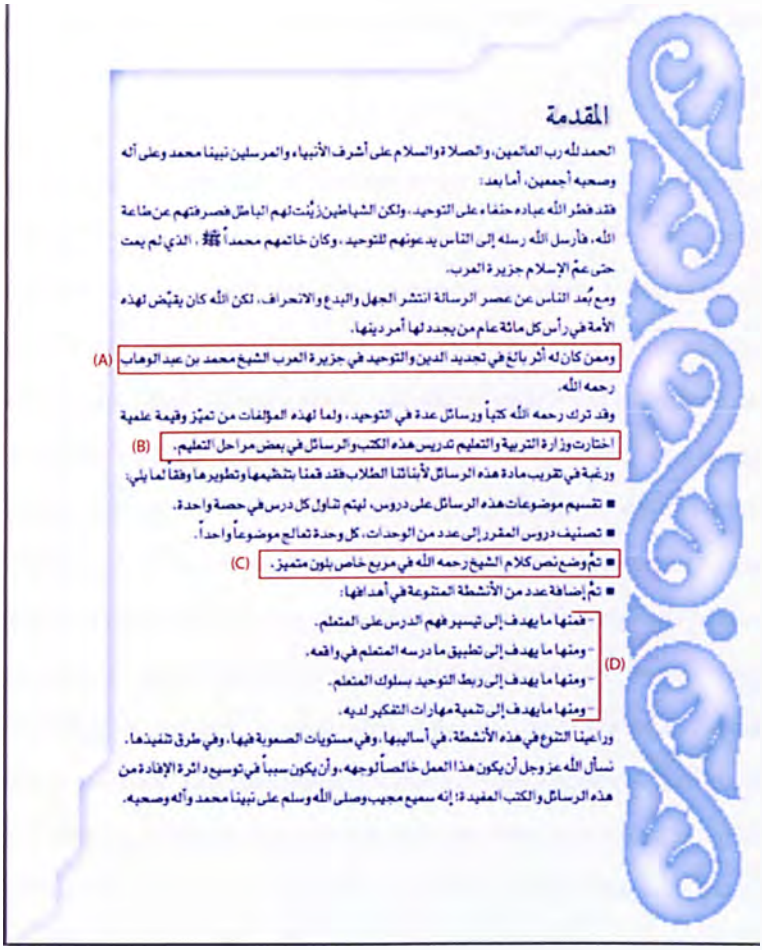
Although this is not enough evidence to argue the use of a selective source of information, it does not contradict the fact that other scholars were marginalized as

valid sources for interpreting the Islamic texts. Analysis of the introductory page of the school textbook attracted my attention to the means used to marginalize other scholars. The following images, taken from the textbook introduction dated before curricula reforms, provide important clues regarding these techniques:

Figure 5 Publication Page of the school textbook

Year 1419 Islamic Calendar = Year 1998 Gregorian Calendar

Source: "Tawheed& Fiqh" textbook, 4th grade



المقدمة

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام على أشرف الأنبياء والمرسلين نبينا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين، أما بعد:

فقد فطر الله عباده حنفاء على التوحيد، ولكن الشياطين زيّنت لهم الباطل فصرفتهم عن طاعة الله، فأرسل الله رسله إلى الناس يدعونهم للتوحيد، وكان خاتمهم محمداً ﷺ، الذي لم يمت حتى عمّ الإسلام جزيرة العرب.

ومع بُعد الناس عن عصر الرسالة انتشر الجهل والبدع والانحراف، لكن الله كان يقيّض لهذه الأمة في رأس كل مائة عام من يجدد لها أمر دينها.

(A) ومن كان له أثر بالغ في تجديد الدين والتوحيد في جزيرة العرب الشيخ محمد بن عبد الوهاب رحمه الله.

وقد ترك رحمه الله كتباً ورسائل عدة في التوحيد، ولما لهذه المؤلفات من تميّز وقيمة علمية اختارت وزارة التربية والتعليم تدريس هذه الكتب والرسائل في بعض مراحل التعليم. (B)

ورغبة في تقريب مادة هذه الرسائل لأبنائنا الطلاب فقد قمنا بتنظيمها وتطويرها وفقاً لما يلي:

- تقسيم موضوعات هذه الرسائل على دروس، ليتم تناول كل درس في حصة واحدة.
- تصنيف دروس المقرر إلى عدد من الوحدات، كل وحدة تعالج موضوعاً واحداً.
- تمّ وضع نص كلام الشيخ رحمه الله في مربع خاص بلون متميز. (C)
- تمّ إضافة عدد من الأنشطة المتنوعة في أهدافها:
  - فمنها ما يهدف إلى تيسير فهم الدرس على المتعلم.
  - ومنها ما يهدف إلى تطبيق ما درسه المتعلم في واقعه.
  - ومنها ما يهدف إلى ربط التوحيد بسلوك المتعلم. (D)
  - ومنها ما يهدف إلى تنمية مهارات التفكير لديه.

وراعينا التنوع في هذه الأنشطة، في أساليبها، وفي مستويات الصعوبة فيها، وفي طرق تنفيذها.

نسأل الله عز وجل أن يكون هذا العمل خالصاً لوجهه، وأن يكون سبباً في توسيع دائرة الإفادة من هذه الرسائل والكتب المفيدة؛ إنه سميع مجيب، وصلى الله وسلم على نبينا محمد وآله وصحبه.

Figure 6 The old introductory page of the school textbook

Source: "Tawheed& Fiqh" textbook, 4th grade

The three statements highlighted in red boxes in Figure 7 include the following: an acknowledgment of Bin Abdul Wahhab's great contribution in purifying the Islamic margins, marked in (A); a clear statement that the Ministry of Education has chosen the scholar's book as an exclusive source for the religious curriculum, marked in (B),

and; a statement that Abdul Wahhab's sayings have been highlighted by the editors, in a private box with a special colour, marked in (C).

Each statement suggests that the information provided within the curriculum was limited to a specific interpretation. More importantly, in the first statement, the Ministry of Education openly and officially supports the scholar's contribution. This instils a layered message implying that most of the other sources are not trustworthy due to the age of great ignorance, heresy, and atheism experienced before the author's contributions. Indeed, if the highest authority on the matter, namely the Ministry of Education, does not endorse certain ideas, how can a teenage girl decide for herself whether they should be trusted? The ministry's position further provides a generalised critique to previous interpretations of the Islamic text and offers exclusive validity to Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab's interpretation. Furthermore, the second statement confirms Bin Abdul Wahhab's interpretation as the only chosen source of information in Islamic teachings. This statement proves that there was a conscious decision made by the Ministry of Education to choose the scholar's book as an exclusive source of information for the religious curriculum. As for the third statement, I noted the highlighting method used to emphasize the sayings of Abdul Wahhab (see Figure 8).

محمد: إذاً يا أبي فالله لايَخْلُقُ شيئاً لغير فائدة.

الأب: نعم يابني، وهذا مايُسَمَّى بالحكمة.

محمد: إذاً فمادام الله خلق كل شيء لحكمة، فما الحكْمَةُ من خلق الناس؟

الأب: هذه الحكمة ذكرها الله في قوله تعالى: ، فهل يمكنك معرفتها يابني؟

محمد: نعم يا أبي، إنها (عبادة الله عز وجل وحده لا شريك له).

الأب: نعم أحسنتَ يا محمد.

اعلَمْ رحمكَ الله أن الله تعالى خَلَقَ الخَلْقَ ليعبدوه ولا يشركوا به شيئاً، والدليلُ قولُهُ تعالى:

(سورة الذاريات ـ آية ٥٦)

نشاطات

١ مَيِّزْ الأشخاصَ الذين عبدوا الله عز وجل بعلامة (✓).

الصحابة

الأنبياء

الكفار

المنافقون

الشيطان

١١

Figure 7Abdul-Wahhab's quote highlighted in the grey box

In information design, highlighting is considered an isolation tool between what is important and what is not. This technique used by an editor to emphasise the sayings of Abdul Wahhab and thus encourage passive readings among students. "The highlighting procedure is normally performed with each student serving as his own judge as to which and how much material should be isolated for study emphasis"

(Fowler and Barker, 1974, p.358). However, in this case, the highlighting and the judgment have been made for the students. The students are told that the sayings of Abdul Wahhab are of absolute importance, and are not allowed to determine what is important on their own. Therefore, the overall sense conveyed by this introduction is that the curriculum was limited to one author.

Reforms, however, have been undertaken in recent years due to international political pressures following the events of 9/11, and I will therefore now explore whether they have significantly altered the restrictive nature of the curriculum and expanded it to include more diversity.

5.3 Towards a Reformed Curriculum?

The traditional curriculum, as argued previously, was restricting and solely focused on a single Islamic scholar. Authorities and policy makers, however, have enacted reforms in response to the events of 9/11. Thus, it becomes necessary to critically assess the contribution of those reforms and their effect on the previous status quo. The reform, passed after 9/11, aimed to alter the educational system of Saudi Arabia, and in particular certain facets of the school curriculum. Those changes are most visible in school textbook introductions. This is resultant to a strong push for changes in the tone of the Islamic curriculum. The goal was to shift away from seemingly radical stances to more flexible, inclusive, and tolerant positions to allow for diverging opinions and more space for individual development.

Despite those goals, the study argues, that within the context of this research, the reform process of the curriculum post 9/11 was, in practice, a repackaging of old contents rather than a profound alteration of the original material. This proposition is based on three points. Looking at the text of 15 schoolbooks critically, it is noted that the changes are minor, superficial, and unrelated to questions of gender identity and gender roles relevant to this research. What is termed a reformed curriculum is still committed to its previous, traditional content. In other words, it is still devoted to presenting one scholar's exclusive interpretation with regard to the core of this research, which is centred on female gender. These three lines of argument are explored as follows.

Firstly, the changes to the messages of the curriculum were minor. Even though the introduction of the reformed curriculum was keen to exclude direct implications presenting Muhammad Abdul Wahhab as the protector of Islamic values, changes were limited to the introductory pages and the removal of specific paragraphs that encouraged intolerance and violence towards non-Muslims. One contrast between the old and new is marked by the removal of the three statements discussed above. As seen in figure 9 and figure 10, two things have been removed in the new curriculum. First, the name of Abdul Wahhab is not present in the new introduction. In fact, the source of the interpretation of the Islamic used in the textbook is not mentioned at all. Secondly, the absence of the highlighting methods of the scholars' sayings is noticeable. However, a new issue appeared within the reformed introduction, which is the vague tone about the sources used in the new curriculum. If it was not clear whether the curriculum was still based on a unilateral interpretation of the religious texts, nowhere did it say that more interpretations were incorporated. Therefore, an

observation on the changes of the textbook's content was necessary to bypass the minor aspect of the changes made to the introduction.

Figure 8 The new introductory and Publication page

Year 1430 Islamic Calendar = Year 2009 Gregorian Calendar

وَدَلِيلُ وُجُوبِ الحَجِّ قَوْلُهُ تَعَالَى: ﴿ وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ حِجُّ ٱلْبَيْتِ مَنِ ٱسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا ۚ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴾ (١).

وَالحَجُّ المَبْرُورُ جَزَاؤُهُ عَظِيمٌ عِنْدَ اللهِ، قَالَ ﷺ: «وَالحَجُّ المَبْرُورُ لَيْسَ لَهُ جَزَاءٌ إِلَّا الجَنَّةُ» (٢).

الأَسْئِلَةُ

١ أَذْكُرُ الدَّلِيلَ عَلَى وُجُوبِ الحَجِّ .

٢ أَصِلُ كُلَّ فِقْرَةٍ فِي العَمُودِ (أ) بِمَا يُنَاسِبُهَا فِي العَمُودِ (ب):

أ	ب
يَصُومُ المُسْلِمُونَ فِي شَهْرِ	ذِي الحِجَّةِ
يَحُجُّ المُسْلِمُونَ فِي شَهْرِ	رَمَضَانَ
الحَجُّ المَبْرُورُ لَيْسَ لَهُ جَزَاءٌ إِلَّا	الجَنَّةُ

(١) سورة آل عمران، آية (٩٧).
(٢) أخرجه البخاري برقم (١٦٨٣)، ومسلم برقم (١٣٤٩).

أركان الإسلام

٢٥

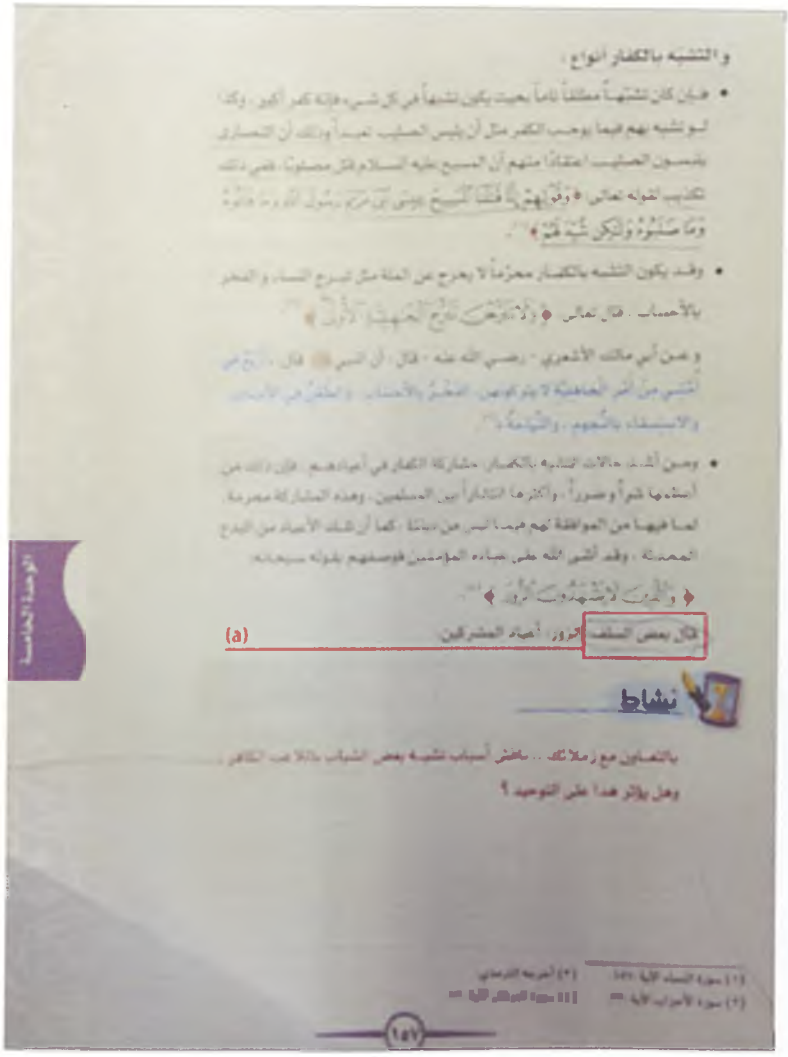
Figure 9 The absence of the highlighted sayings of Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab

Secondly, these changes only focused on the political issues discussed in international media concerning 9/11. More specifically, a curriculum reform relating to the development of female individuality is absent. This further suggests that fundamentally, the message of the curriculum remains the same despite of the so-called reform. The general theme of the reformed curriculum still encourages

concepts opposed to feminism, such as the ideas of female invisibility and inferiority, which are further explored in the following chapters. The text is still committed to the old scholar and his attitudes toward the female gender. However, it is true that this commitment is not as clear and direct as it was in the earlier introduction.

However, beyond the introduction, this characteristic dedication to Abdul Wahhab's teachings can still be observed. In fact, I noticed that the sources of interpretations were either vague or exclusive to a certain scholar whose thoughts are aligned to those of Abdul Wahhab, or referred to as "Salafi's".

The following are images from the textbooks. Boxes (a) and (b) show indirect commitment to the scholar, which in these examples is referred to as the "Salafi" instead of "Wahhabi" - another title for the same school of thought.



والتشبه بالكفار أنواع:

- فإن كان تشبهاً مطلقاً تاماً بحيث يكون تشبهاً في كل شيء فإنه كفر أكبر، وكذا لو تشبه بهم فيما يوجب الكفر مثل أن يلبس الصليب تعبداً وذلك أن النصارى يلبسون الصليب اعتقاداً منهم أن المسيح عليه السلام قتل مصلوباً، فهي ذلك تكذيب لقوله تعالى: ﴿وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ﴾[1].

- وقد يكون التشبه بالكفار محرماً لا يخرج عن الملة مثل تبرج النساء والتختم بالأحمر. قال تعالى: ﴿وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ﴾[2].

وعن أبي مالك الأشعري - رضي الله عنه - قال: أن النبي ﷺ قال: «أربع في أمتي من أمر الجاهلية لا يتركونهن: الفخر بالأحساب، والطعن في الأنساب، والاستسقاء بالنجوم، والنياحة»[3].

- ومن أشد حالات التشبه بالكفار مشاركة الكفار في أعيادهم. فإن ذلك من أشدها شراً وضرراً، وأكثرها انتشاراً بين المسلمين. وهذه المشاركة محرمة، لما فيها من الموافقة لهم فيما أسر من دينهم، كما أن لتلك الأعياد من البدع المحدثة. وقد أثنى الله على عباده المؤمنين فوصفهم بقوله سبحانه:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ﴾

قال بعض السلف: الزور: أعياد المشركين. (a)

نشاط

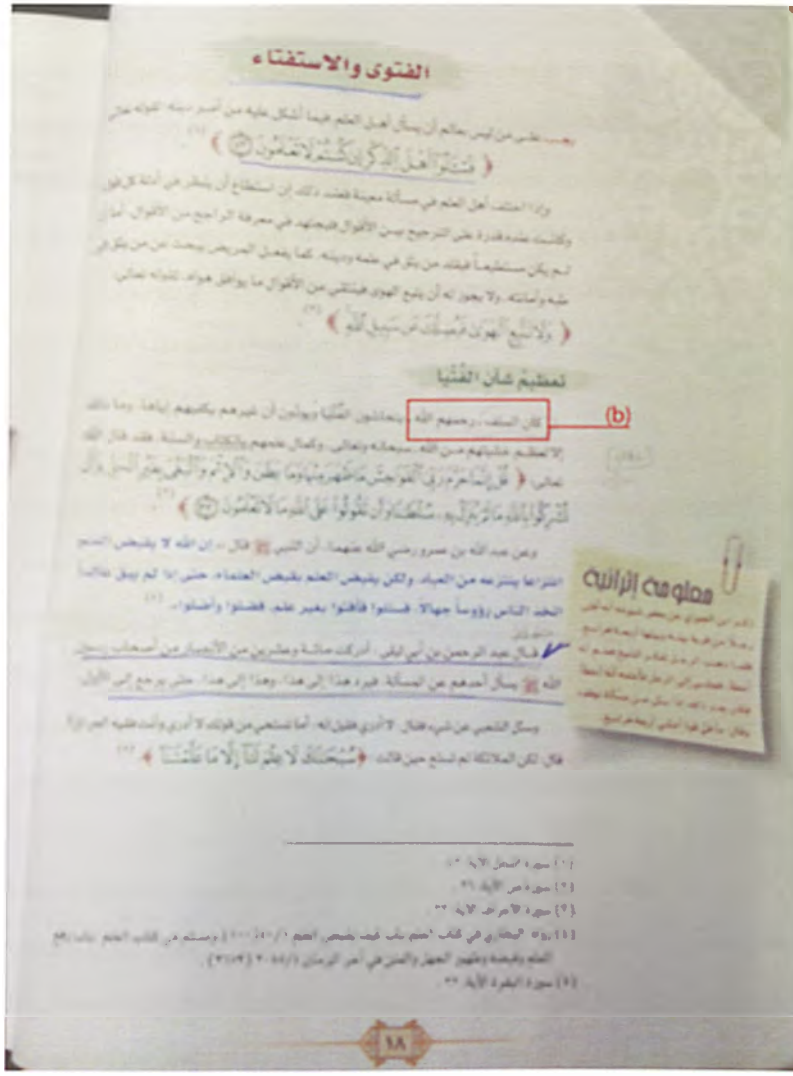
بالتعاون مع زملائك .. ناقش أسباب تشبه بعض الشباب بالألعاب الكفار، وهل يؤثر هذا على التوحيد؟

(١) سورة النساء آية ١٥٧ (٢) أخرجه الترمذي
(٣) سورة الأحزاب آية ٣٣ (٤) سورة الفرقان آية ٧٢

١٤٧

الوحدة الخامسة

Figure 10 The box (a), the replacement of the word Abdul Wahhab to the word "Salafi"



الفتوى والاستفتاء

تعظيم شأن الفتيا

(b)

Figure 11 The box (b), the replacement of the word Abdul Wahhab to the word "Salafi"

Finally, relative to the political efforts exerted in favour of reform, the level of change made to the actual contents of the curriculum is superficial. The reform process was granted a huge budget, superior facilities, and special support from the government.

However, as discussed in the literature review, decision makers and people in-charge of the "Tatweer" Program were spending their budget in the wrong place. Indeed, it was spent mainly on building new schools, designing new logos and printing new textbooks, instead of on generating substantial changes, such as research to improve the learning experience and the intellectual development of students. For example, instead of changing the textbook cover design and the visual layouts, a new text for the curricula's contents should have been produced.

Interview data showed that teachers referred to the changes brought by the reform through a set of expressions that were categorized as "superficial changes", such as "some changes", "more subjects", "attractive book design", "more colourful", "nicer presentation", and "same information". Ms. Khalida, an Islamic teacher, expressed her view on the new reformed curriculum as shallow, saying, "you can't remove a paragraph about a specific subject and call it a reform". The treatment of certain concepts, such as the "Alwala and Albara", is telling. The latter is defined as the prohibition of Muslims befriending or imitating non-Muslims. Policy makers did remove the direct paragraph under the title of "Alwala and Albara". However, the concept is still present in an indirect form, and Figure 12 shows the subject to which Ms. Khadijah was referring. This conversation also revealed that this concept is one example of the conflicts she faces as an educator in teaching religious values that are limited to one interpretation of Islamic values.

The restriction on the number of accepted sources not only hinders the normal development of Saudi girls, as argued presently, but it also makes the teachers' work difficult. This often leads to contradictions between teachers' words and their

behaviour. Ms. Khalida explained her difficult position regarding the concept of 'Alwala and Albara':

> "It is not easy to find the right answer to questions raised by students because of some strict interpretations given by the textbook. For instance, one day a student asked me: "Teacher, my mom is not Muslim, am I supposed to not love her, or share her Christian celebrations? How can my mother harm me?" – Ms. Khalida

The limited and shallow aspect of the reform came as a disappointment to many teachers. Because teachers must always prioritize the message of the official curriculum over their own opinions, many had hoped that the new curriculum would grant more autonomy to the teachers. This was not the case, as one teacher pointed out:

> "Wearing perfume is prohibited based on the school textbooks. I think that this is a strict opinion that is limited to one scholar. When I heard about the curriculum reform, I thought that such concept would be revised by bringing in more scholars' opinions. This wasn't the case." - Ms. Mona

This so-called educational reform and reform of the curricula could hardly be considered as such. Indeed, only minor and superficial changes were made, with no noticeable alterations to the centuries-old framework of ideologies presented by

Wahhabi theologians. Therefore, this process of 'reform' is no more than a repackaging of old products, as it only applies to those areas of the curriculum that answer directly and relate to the events and critiques of 9/11, and hardly touch upon such topics as depictions of the female gender. In many ways, the reform was an effort to meet the hot political topics at the time, rather than an attempt to change the fundamental basis of the messages taught by the old curriculum.

The original assessment of the curriculum therefore still stands despite the reforms. The study, as a result, now moves on to analysing how this enduringly restrictive curriculum affects Saudi women's identities – the first step in the development of individuality – in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: BUILDING IDENTITY

6.1 Introduction

Now that the school environment's characteristics have been illustrated, the thesis will analyse more precisely and specifically the nature of the identities born of this context. This chapter extends the literature on Islamic and Saudi feminism by exploring the way identity is built in teenage Saudi girls within their school environment and Saudi society. As shown with regard to the literature on social research in Saudi Arabia, there is a scarcity of studies examining the components of female identity. Indeed, most sociological and psychological research investigating Saudi societal institutions is concerned with uncovering the roots of extremism and predominantly focuses on politics, which, in Saudi Arabia, is very much a man's world. Hence, for reasons pertaining to current affairs and the urgency of determining the origins of terrorism in order to eradicate it, there has been a marked neglect of gender studies based in Saudi society without it being secondary to a primarily politics-focused goal. The few works examined in the theoretical framework, such as the works conducted by Yamani and Al-Rasheed, only mark the beginning of academic interest examining female identity in Saudi Arabia.

In this chapter, the study uses the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter as the basis for my interviews of Saudi female students. By giving them a voice, I strive to prioritise their accounts of their experience as Saudi women and to gain insightful knowledge on the way in which they approach their own education and reflect upon

their feelings. The final aim of the thesis is to shed light on what they think makes them "women". Specifically, I investigated their sense of "identity" as it is explored in Chapter 3, based on two elements: their physical and intellectual portrayals. By defining the parameters of Saudi society in terms of respectability, decorum, social expectations, and social norms throughout the school curriculum and the teachings of the school staff, two interlocked aims are pursued. On the one hand, the study seeks to recreate the image that society projects onto Saudi girls as a prerequisite to considering them as 'women'. This is a quintessential idea fostered in recent gender studies, notably starting with Simone de Beauvoir who argues that the concept of gender is a social construct. In this chapter, the study aims to draw a faithful account of the *(public self)* concept of the woman in Saudi Arabia, as it is understood in Chapter 3. On the other hand, I also analysed the way in which this idealised vision of the Saudi woman is internalised by the students. The observations highlight the existence of a discrepancy between the socially expected set of beliefs and behaviour imposed by the Saudi environment, and the students' actual understanding of what is expected of them as well as the perceived reasons behind these constraints, often leading to a sense of confusion and dissonance. This is driven by the understanding of the *(private self)*, as discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter will conclude with a classification of the various types of identities observed among Saudi girls because of their traditional school education according to the theory provided by Castells (2010).

6.2 Life in the Public Sphere: Women as Invisible Figures

"You are what you wear." Although a fashion cliché, this remark does offer a rather apt summary of the power of clothing on one's definition of identity (Arvanitidou and Gasouka, n.d.). Because of the direct physical contact and intimacy of one's dress

with one's body, clothing is a crucial factor in the construction of social identity in general, particularly within the realm of gender identity (Arvanitidou and Gasouka, n.d.). Clothing as a form of material culture is particularly suited to express the relationship between an individual's personal values and those assigned to material goods, because of its close relationship with the perceptions of the self. The way people dress affects – and reflects – their perceptions of their private self; their personality, their belonging to certain groups, their moods, and their place in society. It has a specifically unique character as a code of behaviour. Clothing is different from all things material in that, due to the direct contact with the body, it acts as a filter between the individual and their surrounding social world (Crane and Bovone, 2006). Dress code in this observation was shown to have a crucial influence on building a sense of identity among students. Clothing is not simply a superficial concept – it is meaningful in terms of personal expression within social norms.

Concerns about the dress code were saturated with observations related to the nature of the environment. The data collected revolved around two dress codes: the compulsory uniform inside the school environment, and the Veil and Abaya when leaving the school environment. The difference between the school uniform and the Veil and Abaya in this research is that the uniform is not related to religious guidelines while the other one is. Hence, student attitudes towards each set of guidelines were contrasted by different meanings. In the following paragraphs, these contrasting attitudes will be further explored, and the reasons behind them explained in detail.

In this research, the dress code inside the school was not a determining factor, in relation to identity within the public sphere, as the dress code of the Veil and Abaya worn outside school perimeters. More specifically, the benefits and shortcomings of the school uniform were not the focus of the observations, as they did not represent religious concepts as much as they represented an institution's regulations. As such, they were less prominent than the religious dress code, which appealed to an inner set of beliefs and symbolic behaviour in the students. The priority was therefore to explore students' attitudes towards the restrictions relating to their physical representation and to their sense of identity in general, with a special focus on the Islamic curriculum. However, the contrasting attitudes towards the two dress codes were important in investigating the influence of the physical portrayal in building of identities among students. The thesis will consequently explore in slight detail the school uniform and its relation to identity before delving deeper into the codes and rules surrounding the Veil and Abaya.

6.2.1 Dress Code and Respectability: The School Uniform

The school uniform is a global concept and is not unique to Saudi Arabia. In fact, school uniforms are common in many countries, especially at primary and secondary levels. School uniforms for girls in Saudi Arabia are similar to those found in other countries in most aspects except for the fact that, in Saudi Arabia, it must cover the legs and arms completely. For instance, the school uniform worn by the students who participated in this research is a blue, long, pleated skirt, a white long blazer, and plain black shoes. There are strict restrictions, which prohibit adding any other colours in the attire through other items such as socks or headbands. The reasons

justifying the strictness and specific nature of those rules as well as their impact on Saudi women's identification will be explored in this subsection.

A majority of students were found to hold generally positive attitudes towards their school uniform. However, a significant minority did display negative attitudes. In general, students were committed to the colour restrictions. More interestingly, they expressed a strong sense of pride and belonging to their schools when they were asked to reflect on the multiple meanings of wearing the school uniform; notably through such questions as "What does the school uniform mean to you?" Responses from students contained phrases such as "part of my school, "where I'm from", "best", and "better than other school uniforms". These ideas were all grouped together after several readings of the transcripts into the general concept of "belonging".

Likewise, the study also classifies a minority of responses referring to the opposite feeling of 'rejection'. This was conveyed in three responses, which contained unique expressions, such as "boring", "not me", and "they need to change it". If the study were to generalise the reaction of three student accounts out of twenty interviewed in total, it would present an imbalanced view of the scenario. However, this observation was further supported by six other students, who expressed their rejection through their behaviour rather than through verbal answers to research questions. These students' behaviour was classified under the concept of 'resistance'. On the other end of the spectrum, a lack of resistance coupled with the absence of a feeling of belonging, suggested a mere sense of 'acceptance'. Hence, an inclusive analysis of the wide range of attitudes showed that were four broad meanings were attached to the school uniform, associated to four degrees of appropriation and internalisation, which are acceptance, belonging, rejection, and resistance.

Defining those concepts more thoroughly:

- **'Acceptance'** refers to the students who were committed to the rules of the dress code but who did not necessarily belong to it with regard to their sense of social identity.
- **"Belonging"** refers to students who accepted the dress code and related it to their sense of social identity by appropriating it and internalising its symbolic message.
- **'Rejection'** categorizes students who were committed to the dress code but expressed verbal rejection to its enforcement.
- **'Resistance'** categorizes students who possibly reject or accept the dress code verbally, but expressed a form of resistance – an unwillingness to commit to it. In other words, this last category comprises students who attempted to bypass the rules.

These four meanings provide a useful framework that would help illustrate student attitudes towards both dress codes of the school uniform and the Veil and Abaya dress code, as is further detailed presently.

How did students resist and reject the school uniform? Three teachers and a social advisor stated that there were some forms of resistance to the colour restrictions. During five months of observation, six students out of 200 expressed some form of resistance. For instance, Anan was found wearing a light purple headband, matched with a purple watch, even though she was aware that the social advisor would permanently confiscate them as a punishment. In addition, Yusra was found wearing a t-shirt with the image of "Usher", a Western male singer. Her punishment, on the

other hand, included spending extra time after school hours solving math problems. Yet, ultimately, 194 students out of 200 expressed "acceptance" and "belonging" to the institution's restrictions.

Analysis of the enforcement of the school uniform within the school environment raised the issue of another dress code in Saudi schools for serious consideration. Uniforms demonstrably affect perceptions of female sexuality in the presence of the opposite sex. In the research so far, this was not an applicable concern due to sex segregation in Saudi educational institutions as well as the high degree of acceptance and conformity. On the other hand, in circumstances where sex segregation is not applicable in the public sphere, particularly as students leave the school environment, this concern re-emerges. Then, the Veil and Abaya dress code comes into play and defines female identity and sexuality in the presence and under the gaze of the opposite sex. This second dress code is consequently a determinant to Saudi women's identity as this code ties the identity into a wealth of religious and sociological values, as is discussed further.

6.2.2 Dress Code and Respectability: The Veil and Abaya

The Veil and Abaya (V&A) will now be analysed. Labelled by the school as Islamic dress code for Muslim women, its definition is derived from religious values within the curriculum. According to the classroom observations, V&A is in theory a plain black fabric that covers the entire body, with a plain black veil that covers the hair and the neck. Schools gave further, more specific restrictions completing the basic definition of the V&A, namely that it should be plain without any colourful materials, such as coloured lace or ruffles. It should also be loose enough so that the figure of

the female body remains hidden. More details regarding the method Muslim women should use to cover themselves in the public sphere were also raised in classroom discussions. For instance, the question of wearing specific colours in public was highlighted as an important detail in many of these discussions. According to the curriculum, women are not allowed to wear colours that attract attention, as they do not fit within the limits of a 'correct' representation of the 'Islamic Identity'. However, rules in relation to the face veil, or what is called the *Niqab*, were left more open to personal beliefs and preferences. Therefore, the definition of the Islamic dress code given by the school – as opposed to the curriculum *per se* – is simply to be covered from head to toe with the colour black.

Unlike the school uniform, which mostly triggered feelings of acceptance or belonging, negative feelings of rejection and resistance were found among most of the students with regard to the V&A. Furthermore, feelings such as '**shame**' and '**fear**' were associated with many of the student responses. In fact, only a small minority of students expressed their acceptance and a sense of belonging attached to such a definition of the Islamic dress code as imposed by the school. Students were divided into two groups of those who expressed their acceptance but lacked a sense of belonging, and those who expressed their rejection but without any manifestations of resistance, with a ratio of about 30:70. Few of them showed an actual sense of belonging in their acceptance, just as few of them expressed resistance as the further step in their rejection. The majority of students were found in the middle, rather than at the edges, of the spectrum.

The situation was rendered even more complex by the importance of other factors in the student level of acceptance or rejection of the second V&A. Often, there was a

sense of confusion or suppression. The former was even more prominent when observing the environment inside the school as opposed to the public environment of Saudi Arabian society outside the school. Confusion was born of the students' unsatisfactory understanding of the fundamental differences between these two spaces, which would make the distinction in dress codes necessary. Confusion and suppression are the results of a set of contradictions and a lack of personal expression, which are explored further below.

- **Contradiction**

My observations highlight many instances in which the V&A dress code had been imposed with a degree of contradiction. In fact, the majority of students received mixed signals as to when and why they should wear the V&A, especially in instances in which their teachers did not enforce the rules for themselves. This contradiction was emphasised in the following scene, drawn from observational notes on the school environment.

Scene1:

View 1: A step behind the door

Leaving the school at the end of the day with the students, I found Ms. Basma, a social supervisor, standing next to the school gate to ensure that each student covered her face with a plain black headscarf before the supervisor herself made her way to her car.

View 2: A step past the door

Observing a different view of the school gate from outside of the school, it was noticed that most of the students removed their headscarves as soon as they passed through the gate, some exposing their faces but still covering their hair, while the rest abandoned the veil completely. This reaction occurred only when they knew Ms. Basma (the authority) could not see them. Some cars were driven by high school young men waiting to steal a glance or any kind of attention from the schoolgirls. In fact, some were the schoolgirls' boyfriends.

The contradiction found through the observations in general and in the above scene specifically has two layers:

- contradiction within the role model – Ms. Basma's attitude
- contradiction within the students

The contradiction in Ms. Basma's attitude can be explained in her understanding of her role as an educator. Ms. Basma comes from a moderate background, and she herself does not cover her hair in public places outside of working hours. In other words, as soon as school is over and in her personal life, Ms. Basma does not apply the V&A the way she demands it of her students. Most of the students know this fact about Ms. Basma. Thus, the scene described above is typical of a 'Do as I say but not as I do' mentality, in which the teacher is expected to teach religious values by way of example, but fails to implement these at strategic times. This becomes problematic when dealing, as Ms. Basma was, with a body of students too young to grasp the difference between working hours and personal time, and who have not been made

aware of the true, symbolic meaning of a dress code. Again, at that age and in the Saudi school environment, students are still learning largely through imitation. Therefore, Ms. Basma's attitude was deeply troubling for the students' development, and led to feelings of confusion.

When the teacher was asked about her personal attitude towards the dress code outside her working hours, her defensive response was, "It's outside working hours, so it's my personal life". Upon further examination of the religious context, she responded, "I'm aware that the veil is religious, but not to the extreme of covering the face". The role model herself voiced an opposed opinion to the value she was trying to instil among her students. "We need to make sure they are fully covered, even though I don't really agree with its extent." This incongruence between the role model's opinion, her behaviour, and the content of her teachings signalled a deep-rooted contradiction among the educators. Hence, a contradiction in the meaning-making of the concept of the Islamic dress code was introduced among students.

Secondly, at the students' level of development, this process of meaning-making of a religious concept through a contradictory role model results in the formation of a contradictory perception on a personal level. The latter shows a clear pattern of transference from Ms. Basma's contradiction to her students concerning the value of the V&A dress code. But the students do not understand why Ms. Basma was a different person inside and outside the school, and why she only emphasised certain rules within school hours. Therefore, the students were living a contradictory experience, as shown in the transition between view 1 and view 2. When questioned about her behaviour in the second view, Ms. Basma clearly defined the extent of her

authority and its limits: "We are not responsible for what happens outside the school". To this, she added her awareness of such a contradiction, "I know that some of the students feel as if they're living two different lives, one inside the school and another one outside". Unfortunately, Ms. Basma did not seem to have any solution to this status quo. As a result, this contradiction led to another state of attachment, which is confusion.

Confusion among students was predicted as a result of their contradictory experience with regards to their dress code. Indeed, the most striking aspect of the first scene is that the presence of a mere school gate, a seemingly inanimate and negligible object holds a disproportionate amount of authority. Before it, a certain set of values embodied by Ms. Basma within her working hours only prevailed. Beyond it, values were left behind or even overturned as their material manifestations (the dress code) were abandoned. The confusion in student responses when asked about the different treatment towards the V&A dress code suggests that, beyond the fixity of rules, the students themselves could not understand a symbolic difference that the role model had failed to explain entirely, i.e. the disproportionate role embodied by the school gate regarding implementation of Islamic values expressed through dress code. To the students, the difference between Ms. Basma's behaviour inside and outside the school perimeter was not that she had a professional and a private life, but rather that she was first inside, then outside the school – there was no perceived symbolic difference between the two spaces. The disproportionate and misplaced amount of meaning given to the school gate in this scene testifies to this misunderstood distinction.

This seemingly meaningless distinction in student understanding led to feelings of confusion, which was shown in statements such as "I don't understand the difference", "I really don't know", and "why here but not there", and even more direct statements such as "it's confusing". One student, Heba, became frustrated when she was questioned about the definition of the Islamic dress code. As she was trying to make sense of the mixed messages she received in regard of her physical representation as a Muslim woman, she said, "Oh, I really don't know. In the classroom the teacher says it's optional if I cover my face, but when we leave the school, they force us to cover our faces, and what's more confusing is that, some days it is okay if we don't cover our faces but of course we need to cover every single hair". Furthermore, following certain statements expressing confusion, other statements also appeared which strongly demonstrated rejection and acceptance.

Students who reject or accept the V&A dress code as a concept are divided into two groups. Most of those who rejected it, did so verbally, without resisting it through any kind of action such as disobedience to the rules. Only a few rejected it and showed a form of resistance by refusing to commit to it to some extent. On the other hand, the other majority of students showed an acceptance of the restrictions imposed by the dress code in spite of the contradictions and confusion born of their teachers' behaviour. In fact, their acceptance lacked a certain sense of belonging. Indeed, only few students appropriated the V&A dress code as part of their identity, or used their sense of belonging to its symbolized ideology to shape their sense of identity. Again, only a few students who showed acceptance were able to demonstrate a sense of belonging, and to support this feeling with rationalized reasons. Among them, there was a general sense of fear. Some students expressed their sense of belonging to pure

religious reasoning through the curriculum or their parents, although none expressed a rational background for this sense of belonging. Mashael proudly answered my question about the motivation behind covering her face: "I cover my face when I leave the school not because of Ms. Basma but because I have to do it as a Muslim". Yet when I asked her about the reason why Muslim women have to cover their faces, two levels of fear were indicated by her confident answer: her fear of hell and her fear of men.

Mashael further stated, "I don't want to go to hell", and other similar reasons in her belief that the dress code she adhered to would serve "to protect me from all the men around me". Anan argued during an interview: "One of the teachers believes that whoever shows her face will burn in hell. My mom doesn't cover her face. Does it mean that she will burn in hell?" Raneem added: "If you go to a shopping mall for example, you will find more than half of the women showing their faces, I wonder if all of them will go to hell. If it's true, then it's scary". The fear of punishment was signalled as a main motivation behind implementing the act of physical disappearance through the dress code. In section 6.2.3, "fear" will be explored in more depth to offer a critical view on what the students' feelings suggested.

Moreover, all Muslim scholars, including the Wahhabis, agree that most of the religious practices in Islam include the mixing between men and women, notably without covering the woman's face as an obligation. In fact, they all state that women should not cover their faces during *Umrah* or *Hajj*[12] for example. Therefore, another source of confusion comes from the fact that the school curriculum does state that

[12] Hajj: The fifth pillar of Islam. "The Hajj constitute a form of worship involving the whole of the Muslim's being" body, mind and soul, involving time, possessions and the temporary sacrifice of all ordinary comforts and convenience that a person normally enjoys" (Raj and Morpeth, 2007, p.128)

covering her face for an Islamic woman is not an absolute necessity. Yet the school staff implemented this measure as if it were indeed essential. Hadeel smartly noticed this discrepancy, and asked her teacher, "When I went to *Umrah* with my parents, people were wearing different colours such as white, blue and green, is it okay?" She added, "If Allah made all our religious practices together with men, why can't we learn at the same school with them?" Even though Hadeel's second question alluded to another topic beyond the dress code by hinting at gendered segregation, she did question a contradiction between different religious concepts within the curriculum. Sadly, all of Hadeel's questions remained unanswered by the teacher as the latter tried to limit the argument by moving onto another topic.

An overall view of the responses showed that the level of acceptance with no belonging and assimilation is correlated to the level of rejection without resistance. These two attitudes were still categorized under the apparent commitment to wearing the dress code, while disregarding each of these students' personal sense of identity.

Despite the fact that the V&A dress code has been given a religious label, a conversation with Ms. Basma and some students revealed that this regulatory framework is an underlying issue behind the contradiction and the lack of personal expression. As mentioned, Ms. Basma showed an awareness of the contradictory concepts she generated among her students, although she blamed the regulatory framework discussed in scene 1: "It's a regulation which comes from the Ministry of Education and we have to follow it" was her explanation of her 'do what I say but not what I do' attitude to teaching. The regulatory framework factor appears to be the main cause for these two major constraints. The motive behind the events of scene 1,

for example, stems from a secular regulatory framework given a religious flavour. Indeed, the V&A dress code is not strictly religious in the sense that its symbolism is not wholly present in Islamic religion. However, as a policy adopted by the school, it is presented as a religious necessity. In fact, the rationale of the V&A dress code is formed by regulations set by the ministry, which has, predominantly, Wahhabi features. Even though direct knowledge of the regulatory framework behind these constrains were not expressed by the students, some showed an awareness of the differences in defining the dress code either in terms of a state regulation or as a religious guideline. Serene expressed her awareness of this difference: "I know it's Islamic, am not against it, but I'm against the extreme way they force us to cover the face.... Ms. Basma stands at the gate shouting at us to cover". Haifa agreed: "Yes, as if we were criminals".

The V&A dress code is seen by most of the students as a school policy rather than a religious concept. Most acknowledge the fact that *Hijab* is an accepted Islamic concept. However, the V&A dress code does not represent this concept from a purely religious perspective. In fact, it shifts the concept of *Hijab* away from its Islamic value, and makes it a social and national concept. This leads to a realisation that the V&A dress code, which has an Islamic label, is not necessarily Islamic or at least is not perceived as such by the very students who are required to respect it. Such a shift within the concept from a religious to social or national value creates new attitudes towards *Hijab*, between those who respect it as a social identity, those who respect it as a national identity, and those who still respect it as an Islamic identity. These different attitudes were apparent in the following observation.

- **Lack of self-expression**

In this research the question if the definition of the dress code is Islamic or not is answered by a review of the definition of Islamic dress in other Muslim countries. Limiting the Islamic dress to one style by using one colour in Saudi Arabia and implementing extreme restrictions to encourage the public physical invisibility of Saudi women, were strongly argued by several academics as a dress code that symbolized belonging to a state, rather than as a religious instrument. They argue that there is a certain lack of self-expression in the Saudi Arabian dress because of state rules rather than for religious reasons.

Style in clothing is a combination of personal expression and social rules. An individual's dress is influenced by "dominant values, social attitudes, socioeconomic status, and some of the circumstances through which people want to assure their self-introduction" (Arvanitidou and Gasouka, n.d.). In other words, allowing people some freedom in the way they dress means allowing for a balance between personal expression of identity and respect of public restrictions.

Similarly, as we have seen in the literature review, a lack of choice and thereby personal expression in the dress code leads to a certain suppression of individuality. In other Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Kuwait, the Islamic dress code has a different definition than that of Saudi Arabia. This definition offers more flexibility and visibility to the physical representation of Muslim women, notably by letting Muslim women choose whether to practice *Hijab*. In these countries, the aim is to cover the body and hair with normal long clothes of any colour, with the option of expressing one's own style, represented in either classic headscarves or other, more uncommon types of head covers, such as turbans or hats. This tells us that the Islamic

dress code does not lack self-determination by nature but, in my research, this individuality is found to be restricted in the V&A dress code. Therefore, the V&A dress code can be defined as national or social, rather than Islamic, as it is not shared by all (or even the majority of) Islamic countries.

The lack of freedom of style in the V&A dress code illustrates the suppression of physical personal expression among Saudi students. This suppression was observed in the public sphere in Saudi Arabia, in contrast to the sense of freedom felt when one leaves Saudi Arabia. Five students expressed this idea of suppression related to the V&A dress code inside Saudi Arabia. However, they also showed that the symbolic meaning of the V&A dress code depended on the environment in which they were. These five students, aged 15 and 16, exemplify the conflict in relating to the V&A dress code as an emblem of either Islamic, or national and social identity. In fact, most of the respondents rejected and resisted the V&A dress code as an Islamic Identity, while the remainder showed acceptance and a sense of belonging. Most of the students saw the V&A dress code as a sign of their social identity. Finally, one student conceptualised the V&A as a national identity and another one as a symbol of Islamic identity.

This shows that the V&A is not a purely Islamic product – in fact, in many ways students saw it as a product of social or national norms. Therefore, they related to it differently depending on their understanding of its symbolism, which varied according to their environment, whether it was inside or outside of Saudi Arabia. However, all the students revealed a greater sense of freedom of expression in their physical representation outside Saudi Arabia. The following section illustrates the differences in rejection and acceptance among students.

Sahar represents students who defined the V&A dress code as an emblem of national identity and rejected it as an Islamic one, stating that she is *Mohajjaba.* This means that she wears the Islamic dress code whenever a non-*Mahram*[13]is present, as well as when she travels. However, her definition of the type of Islamic dress she wears is highly dependent on her geographical location and on the local rules. Sahar said, "in Jeddah I wear the Abaya but when I travel, I wear a turban and a long top and jeans", which means that Sahar defines the V&A dress code as a national identity: outside of Saudi Arabia, she remains a Muslim, but this facet of her identity is expressed with more flexibility in the way she dresses. For her, the V&A is not an Islamic value, but a national norm. Furthermore, her statements illustrate a form of physical individuality, such as "I create my own fashion style"; "I match different colours". As far as she was concerned, the V&A dress code was a kind of a 'national uniform' rather than a religious statement.

Tamara represented the opposite view shared by a minority of students. She expressed her rejection of Sahar's definition and accepted the V&A dress code as an Islamic one: "I wear the proper Islamic dress code, the wide Abaya, and the black scarf even when I travel". Tamara accepted and expressed her belonging to the dress code as a religious guideline. She believed in one definition of the Islamic dress, which is the wide Abaya and the classic scarf – a dress code that could act against her ability to enjoy playing in the park or ride a bicycle at the age of 15. On the other hand, Sahar, who still adheres to an Islamic dress outside the country, enjoys a more flexible definition for her physical appearance, which allows her to move more freely and enjoy her trips without violating any religious values, at least not in the countries she travels to.

[13]*Mahram*: a person in whose presence she is allowed not to wear her Islamic dress, such as her father.

Fatin and Heba expressed the opinions of the majority, which reveals an important layer within the definition of the V&A dress code – the social one. They both rejected the V&A dress code as a carrier of Islamic identity, although they practiced it from a social perspective rather than a religious one. Fatin answered the question about wearing the V&A, stating, "I only wear it because my mum doesn't want people to talk badly about me". She clarified her answer: "People blindly judge a woman for not wearing the Islamic dress code as a woman with bad morals". Her stance was further substantiated by Ranem, "In our society (referring to Saudi society), if you are covering your hair perfectly and your face, you're considered an angel even if you have other bad morals such as lying." As such, Fatin's main concern was the public self; her image and reputation in society. Furthermore, Fatin's desired representation of her physical identity was based on social values, notably Saudi society's insistence on female disappearance from the public sphere. Heba proposed a more critical and direct opinion towards society: "I wear the V&A only because it's a social norm, although most of the people I know, wear it for a traditional motive". This layer of meaning differs from the national one in that in the previous situation, there was a sense of shared identity with people abiding by the same rules under the same government and within the same geographical boundaries. For Sahar, wearing the V&A meant that she was a Saudi woman, whereas in this situation, the dress code is seen as unavoidable to preserve personal and family reputation and standing in society. The V&A dress code here is primarily used as a sign of respectably obeying social norms.

Interestingly, the last participant, Ferdous, presented a special yet the most relevant aspect of the contradictory images of the Saudi woman in the international

community, which was presented in the introduction of this theme. She stated, "I do wear the *Niqab* in Saudi Arabia because all of my family wear it, but when I travel I enjoy wearing the latest fashion, with nice make up and of course I don't cover my hair". To Ferdous, the values that the dress code could be based on mattered little. In fact, these would nearly always rank secondary to her own sense of style defined by her own individuality whenever she could apply it. In a way, she expressed an inability to relate to her so-called Islamic dress code when it came to her identity. Regardless of whether this attitude was born of the conceptual confusion related to the dress code, or a personal inability to internalise it, Ferdous' attitude shows that Saudi female identity is complex, and the long-established social institutions responsible for defining cannot be simply taken at face value. In other words, policies do not always translate perfectly in practice, even in such a restrictive and constraining sphere as Saudi society.

Thus, both the heavily veiled woman and the moderate one, viewed by the international community, could be the same individual, such as Ferdous. This proves the dramatic influence of the nature of environment on the physical representation of Saudi women. It also concludes that the definition of the Islamic dress code in the curriculum is not strictly Islamic, and it is fed by an ideology that enforces an invisibility of the physical identity among female students.

The next section links this analysis more directly to the research question that relates to the nature of the environment. The analysis showed that the environment – whether it is the school or the geographical boundaries of Saudi Arabia – has a huge influence on the way in which Saudi women represent the *public self* physically, which is crucial to the development of their personal sense of identity.

The two differing observations on the nature of the environment in relation to the V&A dress code showed an overall view of the level of acceptance and rejection among students. An equal sense of rejection (without resistance) and acceptance (without belonging) was found in the first observation in Saudi Arabia. Inside the school perimeter, female students have to follow the school uniform as a school policy. Outside the school, but within Saudi society, they have to follow the V&A dress code as a binding social or national concept with a religious flavour. However, in the second observation relating to the V&A, rates of rejection (with resistance) were higher than acceptance. Outside the country, students do not necessarily have to follow Saudi Arabian rules on clothing. However, many still practice it but with a more flexible definition, while a significant minority still practice the V&A dress code to the letter, even outside the country. This last group of students is the only one that has internalised the V&A dress code as a defining element of their identity as Saudi women. Still, the general theme of the V&A dress code confuses and suppresses the physical identity of the Saudi woman in the country. This applies more specifically in the social environment, which fosters the social invisibility of women through the educational curriculum. As expected, this is an unhealthy way for them to build their identity. But physical invisibility does not end at visual appearance – it also extends to the realm of verbal expression, a theme central to issues of identity, which is the topic of the following paragraphs.

6.2.3 Female Voice

Due to the need to interact with the V&A dress code on a personal level and the numerous contradictions observed regarding its symbolism with regards to identity, the V&A dress code has a larger weight in the analysis of physical identity. However,

other related concepts are pertinent and need to be considered. Similar to the dress code, these concepts were present in the curriculum, discussed in the classroom, and investigated during reflective interviews. To support this argument in this larger argumentation regarding the physical portrayal of the female identity, another key observation lies in the prohibition of the female voice and the female name in the public sphere. As discussed in the literature review chapter, sex segregation and the suppression of the female appearance have always been the main theme for ideological interpretations of the religious texts. As such, the female body in the school textbook was seen as a source of chaos or seduction, *i.e.Fitna*. Observational notes in the classroom presented another example of how the suppression of the physical presence is defined throughout the curriculum. The following is a class exercise, which consisted of a question raised by the teacher and answered by Hayat:

Q. The teacher: What is the rule about the female sound/voice in front of a man? Why?

A. Hayat: It's forbidden because the female sound is considered *Fitna*

The Teacher: "Correct"

Figure 12 Classroom Exercise 1

Source: Classroom observations

The analysis showed that *Fitna* is the general rationale used in the curriculum to justify most of the prohibitions related to Muslim women, and the exercise displayed above is a perfect illustration. Strikingly, it shows that the physical disappearance of the female identity is not only limited to a woman's face through the strict rules of the V&A dress code, but also extends further to the disappearance of the female voice. The voice is not merely sounds – it is an expression of personal opinions, feelings,

and emotions. Giving someone a voice can also be a sign of acknowledgement and respect for their presence. Therefore, the suppression of the female voice in the public sphere can be considered a symbolic treatment of women's opinions. Such a ruling has been simply rationalized with the word *Fitna*.

An illustrative classroom discussion between the teacher and the students followed this exercise. The students in this discussion tried to relate the prohibition to its rationale and sometimes challenged their teacher. This was done through repeated questions and the use of sarcastic comments, as shown in the scene below:

(a) Hayat raised her hand: "How come this is the correct answer; it's wrong"

(b) The teacher: "No, it's the right answer. It's forbidden because the female sound is considered *Fitna*

(c) Hayat asked a more challenging question: "Then could we sometimes be wrong to be correct?"

(d) Raneem asked. "Does this mean I can't talk and say my opinion about something because I'm a woman?"

(e) The teacher: "Of course you can say your opinion but it doesn't have to be in public, or you can write it down if it's for the public"

(f) Raneem gladly stated: "Great! Then I'll start writing articles in my dad's magazine, he promised if it's a good one he will publish it for me and get my name recognized"

(g) The teacher immediately responded with a concerned voice: "But you are not allowed to write your real name, it needs to be under a nickname.

(h) Raneem whispered with sarcasm: "Oh yes, men will be seduced by my name"

The students laughed.

Figure 13 Classroom Discussion

Source: Classroom observations

Once again, a sense of contradiction mixed with confusion and rejection was witnessed in relation to the physical identity of Saudi women. The questions raised by Hayat in (a) and (c) stressed the contradiction, within a religious context, between right and wrong, while Raneem's question in (d) shows a state of irrationality within the concept presented in the exercise. The sarcasm in Raneem's statement in (h) points to a rejection of the religious concept proposed by the teacher with regard to the exposure of a woman's name. In addition, Raneem's statement in (f) signals a different treatment in the media compared to the school curriculum towards female physical portrayal, which will be discussed in Chapter 9.

The prohibition and its rationale in this exercise were faced with confusion and sarcasm as a form of rejection. In the classroom discussion, Raneem treated it as a joke, and most other students agreed with her in her rejection of the proposed rationale through their laughs. The teacher's passive response with a confused facial expression was a sign of unexpressed doubts regarding the level of prohibition taught in the official curriculum. These doubts were also sensed in her later answers about limiting the classroom discussion in the following paragraph. In any case, teachers were found to limit similar discussions or end them whenever possible.

The regulatory framework imposed by the curriculum appeared in several places when investigating the reason behind the confusion and suppression of the physical portrayal. The active act of limiting classroom discussions was explored by asking two teachers about the reasons behind it. One teacher proposed time management inside the class as her main reason, while the teacher in the above classroom discussion responded by whispering, "As teachers, we are only allowed to teach and discuss what is in the textbooks". This teacher added: "It is possible that we don't

believe in every single concept we teach, as some of them are a bit extreme". Again, this attitude is reminiscent of the contradiction in the role model discussed above with Ms. Basma, where the teacher tried to pass on a message she did not believe in or live by concerning the V&A. The extreme suppression of Saudi women's physical identity does not only extend to her physical appearance or her voice: it extends to the suppression of her smell in the public sphere through the prohibition of wearing perfume when leaving the house. As the following figure 15 presents it:

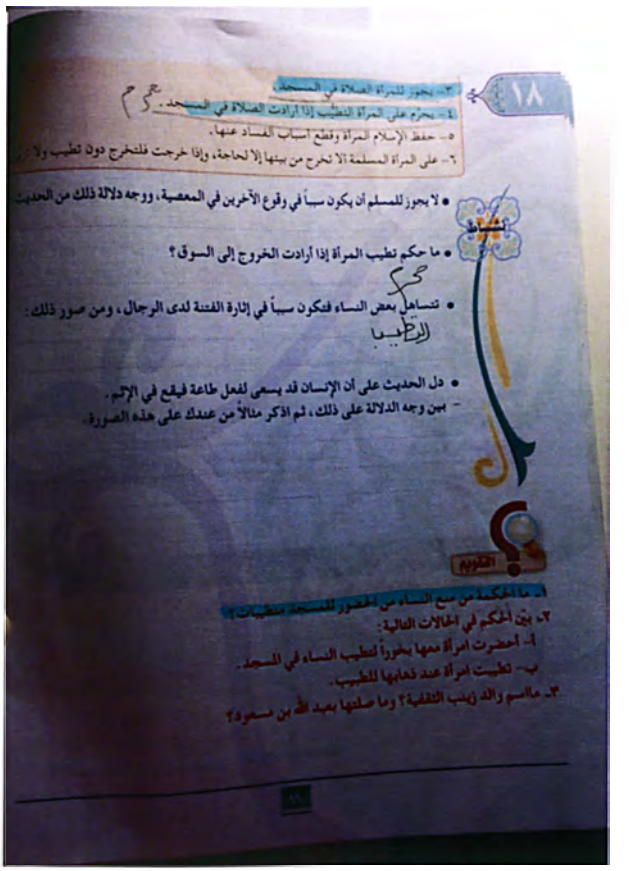


Figure 14 Prohibition of Perfume

Source: School Textbook

At first, I did not expect observations made at the school gate to be too significant to my research. However, surprisingly, as the thesis progressed, they became key observations. The school gate symbolizes the border between two different environments: the school and the Saudi society. As already indicated in the first scene, behaviours with a religious connotation can be radically different inside and outside the school, therefore hinting at their social, rather than strictly religious value. Thus, further evidence to support the argument in the above analysis was found in scene 2, which was an observation made at the school gate. Scene 2 demonstrates that the different expectations attached to a woman's name inside the school and outside of it had contradictory rationales, which again led to a strong sense of confusion.

Scene 2:

View 1: A step behind the door

Leaving the school at the end of the day with the students, I hear the voice of the security man calling each student's full name in the microphone. Only when one's name is called is one allowed to leave the school.

View 2: A step past the door

Each driver goes to the security and asks that the student be called by her full name, and her name is heard not only through speakers within the school but in the surrounding streets.

Scene 2 further illustrates the complex web of issues raised previously concerning women's names. First, the scene highlights the contradiction in teaching the suppression of the female name in the public sphere while the members of staff shout

the students' names through loudspeakers daily. Second, student responses, when asked about the contradictory concept between scene 2 and the classroom discussion, reflected the same sense of confusion mentioned before. These two issues are explained below.

The conflicts between two opposite meanings and sets of behaviour under one religious concept are lasting problems concerning female identity in Saudi Arabia. In this example, the prohibition of the female name in the public sphere was a rule given by teachers during the class and confronted by students through the classroom discussion. However, the school staff called each student's full name, which can be heard within as well as outside the school, on a daily basis. In scene 2, the female student's full name resonates in the public sphere; without this ritual, the student cannot leave the school. This contradiction in what is taught and what is practised leads to the second issue – confusion.

Feedbacks from many students were recorded to challenge, and perhaps even reject, the nonsensical behaviour described here. However, in spite of these feelings, many students were shown to generalise their feeling of confusion to a wider body of religious concepts. They went from misunderstanding one set of contradictory behaviour to extending their judgment to religious rules in general, deeming the latter confusing and sometimes even doubtful. The students confused religious ideas and social norms, and thereby over-generalised and induced a general sense of confusion vis-à-vis most religious concepts. Considering the students ages, this phenomenon is not so surprising; their ideas and identities are in the process of being formed, and the most powerful forces behind this process are usually school education and parents. In this situation, if the behaviour of the school staff is the source of confusion, it is

understandably difficult for the students to determine what to believe in and how to go about complying with rules. As a result, the students expressed a sense of uncertainty and doubt towards religious guidelines.

Doubt and rejection already existed towards the prohibition of the female name in the public sphere without the influence of the contradiction observed in scene 2. In fact, the latter increased the level of confusion and raised a higher sense of doubt, not only towards a specific concept, but also to the original source teaching this concept – be it the teacher or the curriculum. As Khawla and Hana highlighted: "How can I trust what I learn here (referring to the classroom), if they say the female name is prohibited in public, but call my name in the street with a microphone speaker at the end of the day?" and "I never made sense of this anyway (referring with her hand to the textbook)".

Saudi schools teach girls that, for religious reasons, they should not have any public visibility, be it through their dress code, their name and voice, or even their smell. They must build their gendered identity around such values as shame, and disappear for society's sake, as they are represented as sources of temptation and chaos. However, as argued in this section, the strict norms set by Saudi schools regarding the V&A and the prohibition of the female voice are, in essence, more nationalistic than strictly religious, as they were born of the Ministry of Education's decisions, and expressed in the curriculum. Observations regarding the physical identity of Saudi women in the public sphere are, however, coherent, in the sense that they point towards a specific portrayal and analysis of the value of women in society whereby they are expected to remain invisible. As argued in the next section, women are also limited in their capacity to develop a sense of intellectual individuality because of

certain representations of their intellectual and religious value because of their gendered identity.

6.3 Intellectual Portrayal: Women as Inferior Beings

The curriculum's impact on Saudi women's identity and the suppression of female individuality did not limit itself to the physical level – but rather was found equally in the intellectual aspects of the issue. The relevant textbook analysis deals with the intellectual portrayal of women, and the suppression thereof, so intensively that it becomes a major theme here. Textbook observations depict the female mind as incapable of making many decisions about her own life. According to the curriculum, life changing decisions, as well as daily life actions, require the permission of a male guardian, activities like, marriage, work, travel, or even going out from her house for any simple reason such as visiting her relatives, shopping, or seeing a doctor. The lack of diversity in interpreting the prophet's sayings in relation to women's intellectual identity (as presented in 2.3.1) in the curriculum has led to a selective interpretation thereof, which is directed against women's rights and aspirations to freedom and independence. This chapter argues that this selective interpretation justifies and perpetuates the elimination of Saudi women's intellectual identity in Saudi society.

It has been argued that effective education in the twenty-first century, requires that the 'diversity' is viewed as a valuable learning source for all students and that 'differences' are viewed as learning opportunities (Hudson and Ahlquist, 2004; Le Roux, 2002; Maylor and Read, 2007). In Saudi Arabia, however, some of the highly selective and narrow interpretations of Islam espoused by conservative religious scholars have had a restrictive impact on women's education (Jawad, 1998;

Alghamdi, 2002; Hamdan, 2005). A related study about education in Saudi Arabia argues that the literal meaning of these texts; for instance, the Hadeeth passage, is presented as if it were not debatable or questionable. To this end, sometimes extracts of a single Hadeeth are presented out of context, or the supporting passages are carefully selected to bolster the textbook author's interpretation.

When I read the Islamic texts (hadeeth or Qur'an), certain passages have upon me, as they have upon many Muslims, or many scholars, an involuntary spiritual and physical effect. An energetic feeling, a positive feeling, running over the surface of my skin. I cannot control it. But I can feel it again and again, automatically by reading again and again the words of God or his prophet's wisdom. This positive energy vanishes in seconds when I start reading the Islamic texts misinterpretations throughout the curriculum. I asked myself one day in one of the classrooms I was observing, is it anything that can be discovered or defined between these two opposite effects? So I began an examination of the prophet's sayings as recorded in the *Hadeeth*, in relation to women. I have found two clear examples from the textbook for such misinterpretations. These two examples show that even the plainest statement can become completely incoherent to fit the specific selective interpretation implemented in the Islamic curriculum, as I will now develop.

Example One:

"ناقصات عقل ودين"

"Deficiency in intelligence and religion, referring to women"

Example Two:

(الرجال قوامون على النساء)

"Men are in charge of women"

6.3.1 Women as deficient beings

As stated earlier, two examples within the *Hadeeth* can, when taken out of context, be used to bolster specific portrayals of gendered identity. The selective interpretation of the first example is divided into two parts. The woman's mind is the first concern. The meaning presented in the text is that women are intellectually deficient. In other words, their ability to think is lesser than that of men's. Secondly, this idea is also used to refer critically to a woman's religious zeal, *Deen*, which, in this rationale, justifies that men have inherently higher religious values than women. This is explained by the fact that women are not allowed to pray and fast during their menstrual cycle and are consequently prevented from devoting as much time and energy to religion as men for biological reasons. As a result, they have a lower level of reward and are presented in this specific interpretation as a gender with lesser value.

As I have shown previously, outside the curriculum there is a great diversity of interpretations for Islamic texts. In fact, a variety of Muslim scholars, such as Ghazali, Suyouti, Ibn Kathir, Razi, Ibn al-'Arabi, Qortobi, and Nawawi have contributed to this

diversity. However, this is a world pushed out of the narrow confines of the curriculum. With regards to the first part of the *Hadeeth*, which references women's lack of intelligence, other Muslim scholars, such as Jawad (1998) argue that a woman's intellectual capacity, or ability to think, is not discussed or referred to by the Prophet here. If the Prophet's aim was to insult women, he could have given women a blunter answer such as "you are deficient in intelligence because your brains are less wise than men's". However, he clearly did not give such an answer. Moreover, if the Prophet wanted to state or argue that women are intellectually inferior to men, why did the Prophet allow women, such as his own wife Aisha, to teach or educate men? Neither the Prophet, nor Allah Almighty in the Holy Qur'an, treat or view women as inferior or lacking in intelligence and religious zeal. On the contrary, it is well known that the Prophet allowed Muslim women to teach and educate Muslim men as discussed in 2.3.1 (Al-Habri, 1997).

In the second part of the Hadeeth, which is concerned with women's lack of religious zeal, scholars from Al-Azhar University[14] agree that the word referring to religion actually means obligation. Therefore, the passage does not necessarily refer to a lack of religion or religious vigour, and the idea that women have lower religious values than men is not present. It is in fact a single possible interpretation, which is challenged by a wider corpus of scholars. Here, Al-Azhar University scholars have interpreted the passage as the idea that women have fewer obligations than men do. "As for religious deficiency, the prophet (PBUH), states the fact that a woman is exempt from prayer and fasting when she is in menstruation." (Kareem, n.d.). Therefore, we can say that the original texts offer a great deal of potential for varied

[14]Al-Azhar University: Founded in 970 or 972, and renowned as Sunni Islam's most prestigious university. (Azhar.edu.eg, 2016)

interpretations. Extensive scholarship in this area has produced many varied, more fair, and meaningful interpretations. However, the curriculum only selectively offers the interpretation provided by one scholar.

Similarly, the second example of the educational environment's selective interpretations in regards to gender, was centred on the portrayal of a broader sense of gender superiority of men over women. However, many reliable scholars such as Imam Abū Ḥanīfah [15] neglected by the curriculum agree on a different interpretation, which arguably does more justice to the religious text in this example. The word *Qawamoon* in the curriculum is interpreted as 'superiority', which leads to the understanding that the male gender is superior to the female gender. This understanding generated concepts and obligations, such as unchallengeable obedience to the male guardian – the husband, brother, or father. However, another acceptable way of understanding the word *Qawamoon* would be to view it as meaning 'missionary' rather than 'superiority'. This means that the male guardian is a protector who has the financial responsibility of providing for his family (Barlas, 2006). Overall, the diversity of interpretations outside the curriculum shows that the text is concerned with responsibilities and commitments relating to gender, rather than the superiority and benefits of the male gender vis-à-vis the female gender (Abbas and Riaz, 2013).

Surprisingly, many of the student responses expressed a sense of acceptance towards the suppression of the female intellectual identity in the curriculum. When I asked the students about their opinion on these interpretations, most of them included

[15] Imam Abū Ḥanīfah: A renowned Islamic scholar, often called the great Imam, and the founder of the Sunni Hnafi school of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence).

statements such as "this is our religion", or "we have to accept it", or "it's the prophet's saying, I'm sure it's a good thing". There is a noticeable flaw in this passive acquiescence. The students' acceptance indicated a crucial lack of awareness. They did not seem to appreciate the fact that the proposed interpretation, imposed by the curriculum, is exclusive to a single Islamic scholar. Criticizing the use of selective religious texts and a selective interpretation of the religious texts is a highly sensitive argument to voice in Saudi Arabia for several reasons, mainly religious and political. Thus, there is an ignorance of such arguments among families and most traditional Arab media (TV, radio) sponsored by political authorities. This means that, as a result, even students who are more exposed to traditional media are not aware of this fact.

The overall picture I constructed from the analysis regarding Saudi women's intellectual portrayal reminded me of "Venus of Willendorf", a 35,000 years old sculpture (DeFelipe, 2011) "which represents a nude woman, with her head covered with braids or with a hood" (p.5). With an emotional discomfort of accepting the logic of my analysis, I have found the portrayal of the Saudi woman in the curriculum as the modern Venus of Willendorf wearing the V&A dress code. An invisible figure with an undefined intellectual capacity, representing sexuality, infidelity, and reproduction as her main purpose in life.

The analysis showed that the students accepted the belief that women have less religious value and less intellectual value than men do, due to their biological differences, which is a result of the misinterpretation shown in the first observation. Additionally, they accepted the fact that men are superior to women, which is a product of the misinterpretation of the second observation (Qawamoon). This

acceptance is the main culprit behind a myriad of social issues in Saudi Arabia, including the high level of abuse of women and ignorance of women's basic rights as well as gender discrimination. Thus, the behaviour and identity of women is policed and influenced heavily not only from a physical and gender perspective but also from an internal and psychological perspective. This brings me to consider the nature of being a woman in Saudi Arabia and the identities born of the afore-mentioned influences.

6.4 Conclusion: three types of identities

What does it mean to be a Saudi woman? This question does not have a single, simple answer. It will always offer a set of contradictory definitions, within both the national and international community. Is the Saudi woman a veiled one, an obedient and passive damsel in distress, or is she a powerful one, ranging anywhere from a social activist, businesswoman, to even a housewife who travels freely for shopping and leisure? In the international community, the Saudi woman has always been viewed mainly within two contradictory definitions. As Al-Rasheed(2013) points out, Saudi women are seen either as excluded – heavily veiled victims of their own religion and society – or as wealthy, glamorous, and modern entrepreneurs benefiting from inherited wealth and private education.

While existing research demonstrates a positive relation between religion and identity among adolescents, my conclusions tend towards the opposite direction, in relation to the school curriculum. A conceptual framework is presented in King's study (2003), suggesting that religion provides a distinct setting for identity exploration and commitment by providing adequate ideological, social, and spiritual contexts. It is

then suggested that the religious context promotes a sense of identity that transcends the self and promotes a concern for the social good. Similarly, religious institutions provide unique settings for adolescent identity formation. In addition to the potential developmental benefits of religion, negative consequences on identity development are considered (King, 2003). Other researchers found a positive impact of Islam on individual identity; in this research, the literature review on women in Islam 2.3.1 presented this positive impact. However, in my analysis I observed that the misinterpretations of the Islamic text in the Saudi educational system highlighted a negative impact.

An overview of this theme began by analysing the definition of female identity in the religious curriculum. The latter encourage female disappearance from the public sphere, successfully denying them any form of physical identity in public. Simultaneously, it marginalises female intellectual identity verbally and conceptually. First, this section explained the process of shaping the definition of the female identity with relation to socially normative perceptions of the female body and the female mind within the public space; a space that shapes and impacts the very formation of this sense of identity. Then, it highlighted the rationale used to justify this definition through an exploration of the concept of *Fitna* as the official reasoning behind the social oppression of the female gender. This negative association between female presence and chaos is conveyed through the process of conditioning, which equates the female presence with negative emotions, such as vulnerability and the need for protection from danger, and a personal sense of shame whenever rules are transgressed. In addition to these negative sentiments, the use of misinterpretations to some of the prophet's sayings further fuel the sense that the religious texts prohibit

the presence or visibility of women in the public sphere, both physically and intellectually. Finally, this chapter illustrated different attitudes among students towards definitions of female identity and their rationales. These observations supported the hypothesis that education has a direct impact on the emergence and development – sometimes even perpetuation – of these sets of contradictory identities.

From a psychological and gender perspective, the curriculum's attitude towards the female physical presence, and its prohibition thereof, usually unsurprisingly leads to feelings of 'fear' and 'shame'; fear of men, and shame at being a source of temptation and 'chaos'. As I explain later in my analysis of the impact of Twitter, the new social media have contributed to a shift in this type of mentality and perception. However, at this stage, Saudi women's perceptions and identities are still solely based on this traditionally gendered message.

There are two rationales behind the feelings of fear and shame observed in certain students. Fear is developed as a result of the first rationale, which is the protection of women from men. Women are taught in general that the male gender, except for her male guardian, is harmful, sexually violent, and untrustworthy. Thus, protection from this group is necessary. How? By prohibiting women from being visible in the public sphere through such means as the dress code, gender segregation, or disallowing friendship with men. On the other hand, shame is also developed through the need for protecting men from women. Women in this case are viewed as the source of evil: they are instruments of seduction and sources of seductive temptation. As such, they can lead men to commit carnal sins. Consequently, protection of men from women is formed through prohibitions encouraging the disappearance of female identity from

the public sphere: you cannot be tempted by something you can neither see nor approach. Therefore, it is considered shameful for women to be too attention-worthy in the public sphere. These two feelings develop at the basis of an environment with a general sense of suspicion and tension between the two genders. Hence, in order to avoid fear and shame, the female identity in Saudi Arabia will always be treated as an invisible identity.

Although students were found to disagree often with the specifics of this definition of female identity as weak, vulnerable, and unreasonable by nature, the majority still believed in the importance of general religious guidelines as expressed through the curriculum and taught by their teachers. The *Hijab* is a good illustration of this observation. In fact, they seemed to agree with the essential aspects of their religion and its promulgated texts and ideas, while disagreeing with the curriculum's depiction of them when it came to details. Indeed, for most of the students in this study, there is a sense of contradiction in the way they define and represent themselves in the public sphere concerning the way they dress, speak, think, and even smell.

To close on this theme, let us consider different reactions shown in student responses. These were mainly divided into two types: acceptance and rejection. Saudi women's physical appearance, voice, smell, and most importantly, their names and thoughts are crucial to the growth and development of an individual identity. The definition of the physical identity for the Muslim woman in the curriculum was simply constructed along two lines: suppression and confusion. Suppression refers to the constant need for women to downplay their physical presence and intellectual abilities. Confusion stems from the fact that students are told to behave in a certain way for religious

reasons, but then witness a contradictory set of behaviours by the school staff, including teachers. This lack of self-expression and sense of confusion are fostered by the curriculum. More specifically, the latter imposes a single interpretation of the religious texts, which inevitably leads in the two directions described above. However, for practical or personal reasons, teachers do not necessarily adhere to this single interpretation. As we have seen, many interpretations are possible and equally valid. Hence, outside of 'working hours', teachers do not behave in accordance with what they teach. However, they omit, as the curriculum does, to stress the idea that multiple interpretations of the texts are possible, which eventually leads to a strong sense of confusion. Two reactions are therefore observed: acceptance of the message conveyed in the curriculum, which leads to the legitimizing identity illustrated below; or rejection of it, which leads to a resistance identity.

The majority of participants illustrated the idea of the legitimizing identity through the discourse excerpts examined below.

> "I believe that I shouldn't be a source of *Fitna*
>
> - Manal
>
> "I will feel small and degraded when I learn that a strange man was looking at me and my body, especially inside Saudi Arabia"
>
> - Farah
>
> "I make sure I protect myself from men's eyes by wearing a proper Abaya and covering my face"
>
> -Salma

The legitimizing and the resistance identities are both at the heart of Castells' theory of the construction of identity. The legitimizing identity is defined by Castells as an introduced identity by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination – in this case, the educational institution (Castells, 2010). The legitimizing identity is a result of introducing questions of female identity in the Saudi curriculum, and is built based on her disappearance from the public sphere. On the other hand, the second identity is a form of resistance to the curriculum's aims and objectives in building the female identity. Castells defines the resistance identity as an identity generated by the actors in devalued positions and conditions (Castells, 2010). Based on Castells' theory of the construction of identity, both identities are considered ideologised. The third type of identity– projected identity – is absent from the educational experience of the Saudi female.

The projected identity is defined by Castells (2010, p.8) as follows: "when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure.". This was not observed in the educational setting of this research. Building a projected identity for these Saudi students was not part of their upbringing, as a majority accepted and legitimized the curriculum, while only a minority resisted its teachings. Unfortunately, there was not enough material for any of the students to start building a projected identity detached from the values promulgated in the educational environment. Bearing in mind the curriculum's teachings regarding Saudi female identity, and the various types of identities observed in this chapter, I now move on to the next chapter, which treats another aspect of the

development of female individuality, namely the process by which religious and moral perceptions are made based on the nature of female identity in Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FORMING PERCEPTIONS

7.1. Introduction

Within the context of the previously explored curriculum provided to students around the idea of female identity, I now consider the effect such a teaching has on the perceptions and outlook of Saudi women as they grow up. As mentioned earlier, the central characteristic of the Saudi Arabian curriculum is the systematic restriction of the provided information in an effort to make it strictly adhere to the specific beliefs and ideas of policy-makers, especially within a Salafi context. This has a dramatic impact on Saudi women's perception of the world and themselves. Information is an essential tool for human development and the formation of a sense of personal individuality. Used mainly to form ideas within one's self about the world and to reflect upon one's being, it is impossible to generate concepts and ideas without information. These perceptions and ideas influence individual attitudes about self, society and the interactions between the two (the private and the public self). Many experts in the fields of development and education have sought to and have succeeded in demonstrating the power of information in the educational system (American Association of School Librarians, 1998). The question, however, lies in the extent to which the curriculum truly influences the student perception. How deeply are the two interconnected? Within the context of this research, information is defined specifically as the religious concepts and values that students construct and appreciate as Muslims.

As we have established previously, due to the restricted religious nature of the Saudi curriculum, religious texts, left free of much context, can be open to a great variety of interpretations. As a result, depending on one's access to these diverging views and interpretations and one's own relationship with the text on a personal level, it is possible to arrive at widely different conclusions. Perception-formation is thus a crucial phenomenon in each student's experience, since there is no single correct way of becoming a Muslim but rather a wealth of diverging paths through which one must field. Understanding the creation and formation of perceptions within this context is therefore essential to understanding the creation of a student's beliefs, be it in a religious or secular context.

I observed three inter-related ways in which participants formed their perceptions. First, the framework provided by the curriculum and the school enforcing single interpretations of Islamic texts while disregarding other potential readings ensures limited student perceptions. Certainly, one can agree that all perceptions are, to some extent, inherently limited since, in theory, one would need to evaluate all information to arrive at a full and perfectly accurate and impartial conclusion. However, relatively speaking and from a qualitative point of view, these student perceptions are far more restricted due to being limited by the restricted access to information, as well the prejudice fostered by the curriculum rather than the inability to be omniscient. They are stripped of the ability to think in certain ways, not because of the necessary limits of human knowledge, but rather because of the rules set by policy makers. Second, representations of Muslim characters – often heroes – are presented to students as role models rather than objectively portrayed; students are expected to reproduce the role model's behaviour. Of course, given the fundamentally partial nature of the

curriculum, the role models presented are, to a certain extent, unrealistic, as will be argued below in detail. The idealized role models are the figureheads of unrealistically idealized values that are blatantly prompting the students to seek to attain unrealistic goals of perfection regardless of the costs to their own sense of reality or other consequences.

To clarify, this research is not mistakenly assuming that students are merely passive receivers of their school environment's teachings, and is well aware that not all students conform to the established framework. The reality of perception formation is nonetheless directly influenced by the curriculum, and education can lead to a plethora of varying degrees of conformity or non-conformity in students, of acceptance or resistance to the school-backed expectations. Nuance is key. One must be wary of straying into sensationalist myths of Saudi girls as invariably passive and submitting to rules. As the last section argues, a minority of girls did participate much further than by merely obeying the figure of authority in question; acting instead in accordance to their own beliefs and with an underlying sense and intent of self-authorship. This chapter therefore culminates in a discussion of varying levels of conformity and their impact on what interests me most, the question of female individuality in Saudi Arabia, by examining the question of Saudi female self-authorship within the theoretical framework provided by Magolda (2001), as mentioned earlier.

7.2. Access to information

I argued previously that the Saudi curriculum effectively restricts the amount of information available to students by singling out a scholar that the Ministry of

Education approves of. In light of this, many other scholars offering challenging views either are dismissed or given little attention in the textbook, the emphasis hence remains on the ministry-sanctioned interpretation.

How do these restrictions affect student development? Developmental psychologists have used the "information processing approach" (American Association of School Librarians, 1998) to explain the importance of information and its influence on the individual's beliefs and behaviours. The information processing approach characterizes the process through which an input of data provided by the environment is then transformed by an individual's senses. This information can be stored, retrieve and transformed using mental programmes. This complex process results in behavioural responses that are closely linked to learning and human development, where "students actively seek to construct meaning from the sources they encounter and to create products that shape and communicate that meaning effectively" (American Association of School Librarians, 1998, p.2).

Perceptions result from the meeting of information and individual senses. Yet, as I have already stated, my observations revealed that the school environment is determinant in controlling and restricting the sources of information available to students. Each school has its own specific rules and regulations regarding this matter. I carried out numerous interviews to understand why this was the case, and how the teachers felt about it. The responses from three private school principals showed that regulatory frameworks originating from the Ministry of Education were the main reasons behind limiting information to what is available in the school textbooks.

All three participants agreed that they have instructions from the Ministry of Education prompting them to restrict access to any external books other than the school textbooks, particularly books that could challenge the tone of the textbooks' implemented ideologies. These diverging ideologies could include, for example, eastern or the western philosophies. Ms. Elham, one of the school principals, was critical of those regulations. As she explained:

> I can understand the reason behind this policy, although I do prefer that students should be exposed, to a certain extent, to other cultures, philosophies, and theories within the school environment. We're in the digital age and Internet will provide these materials regardless. Thus, it would be good to be present when the student comes across them in order to provide guidance and to answer any further questions.
>
> - Ms. Elham (September, 2012)

The above quotation highlights a fundamental characteristic of the restrictions. Despite the restriction of external sources of information inside the school, students are still unavoidably exposed to them outside the school environment, mainly through the media. This is not without consequences. Unsupervised access to information outside the school perimeter can lead to undesirable consequences, such as misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misjudging, and prejudices.

In this regard, one could hope that the educational reform made a difference since it showed or appeared to voice a desire to provide new online resources. Unfortunately,

despite the *Tatweer* programme and its significant efforts to provide online access to educational content, my argument remains valid: access to information remains limited. Indeed, online and electronic materials are restricted in two ways. In regards to the curriculum in general, information is still closely monitored, and the school environment remains a contained, exclusive realm. Additionally, in regards to the online material, similar constraints limit the available information to the sciences and practical subjects, such as mathematics, geography, and computer skills. The reform therefore fails to truly influence the subject of this thesis, information regarding religion and the development of female individuality in Saudi Arabia. Access to information remains unchanged. Changing the medium of communication without changing the fundamental element of access to information does not affect the way in which perceptions are formed. The result is a mere transmitting of the same old message in a different way. Other determining factors, such as access to a wider set of interpretations, remain unchanged. Therefore, perceptions are formed in a similar fashion regardless of the medium. But what if sources of information outside of the school's reach?

Some students stated the following:

"Whenever I want to know something regarding sensitive issues I would search on Google and find what I'm looking for."

- Hala

"I ask Mr. Google."

- Ehsan

"I don't consider finding interesting information from school. I learn more about my religion from TV Shows, such as Dr. Amr Khaled's

shows [16]; a modern Islamic preacher. Another good TV show is called '*Khawater*'. It shows us our true Islam."

- Raneem

"We, or at least I talk about myself, come to school because of the degree, so we learn what we have to learn. When it comes to any other interesting information, I use the Internet."

- Ruba

In the above statements, the students seem to attribute a particularly important influence to the media as an external source of information. However, such an easy-to-access external source of information, while restricted within the school environment, is likely to be unsupervised outside the school environment. Additionally, some students expressed their appreciation of the religious concepts they received from their parents, or from the media with the supervision of their parents, even if it was sometimes opposed to school curriculum themes. Ruba added to her statement,

> "...or sometimes I ask my father as I enjoy discussing religious issues with him. He talks with me about the history of Islam and other religions, other philosophies and the history of "Muslims in Al Andalus", which I find very interesting and only mentioned in our textbook in small paragraphs."

[16] Dr. Amr Khaled: "a Muslim-Egyptian televangelist, illustrates the ways in which satellite television and the Internet provide a new form for challenging political and religious authority" (Rock, 2010)

On the contrary, Mashael confidently disagreed with her classmates, stating:

> "What we learn is the true Islam and we should respect that. If the government is teaching us this curriculum, it means it's the right Islam. We are in an Islamic country that rules under *Sharia'a* of *Qur'an* and *Sunna*, so we can't doubt the curriculum of Shaikh Abdul Wahhab. He's the one who saved this religion from so many misconceptions and wrong practices".

The clash between Mashael and Ruba is revealing. Here are two significant representations of the role and influence of parents as external sources of information in the context of the formation of religious perceptions. When questioned about her absolute certainty and belief in her perception, Mashael simply responded, "my mother told me." She added, "She's very religious and she teaches Qur'an to children every Monday in our house."

Interviews were considered closely, respecting the age differences between the two groups of participants. The interviews conducted involved group A and group B. Each group had 12 students. An overall view of the responses illustrates three external sources of information:

(1) The traditional media, usually identified through "TV channels", "TV", and "TV shows"

(2) The parents

(3) The internet, identified through phrases such as "Google" and "internet search".

An overwhelming majority of students (65 students in group B and 67 students in group A) agreed that they depended on traditional media, primarily television. This confirms that the mass media is a fundamental source of knowledge in the Arab countries in general and Saudi Arabia in specific (Karam, 2010). Thirty-three students in group B (aged 14-17) agreed that the Internet was generally their main external source of information, while 24 students in group A (aged 10-13) stated that they depended on their parents as external sources of information.

- Majority in group A (67 students) & B (65 students): traditional media
- 24 students in group (A): their parents
- 33 students in group (B): the Internet

Parents are viewed as a source of supervision outside the school environment. They provide frameworks of control for the type of information presented to their children, either by limiting or allowing them to access the media, or by discussing certain issues with them. However, a new voice hailed me of an important question, what happens when the two frameworks – the school and the parents – possess contrasting views? An analysis of the interview data demonstrated that while some parental teachings aligned with the school's ideology, other parental teachings disagreed to varying extents. This phenomenon has strong repercussions on the students' experience vis-à-vis their textbook and fellow students. Mashael's sense of offense at her classmates' criticism of the Islamic curriculum is a powerful illustration of the phenomenon. After further investigation into Mashael's disagreement, I discovered

that her parents' influence was the main reason for such disagreement as her mother comes from a conservative background in which she was taught the same curriculum without ever being exposed to external sources of information, such as the internet, until recently. On the contrary, Ruba testified to her father's influence in exposing her to other views on the Islamic text, some of which were not presented in the textbooks.

Parents therefore play a crucial role in filtering the effects of the Islamic curriculum and the media among students (aged 10-13). The individual agency of students and the influence and social standing of their parents are critical factors in determining the outcomes of education. However, this filter is affected by the level of educational supervision (Doumato and Posusney, 2003). Objectively, it is impossible to decide whether parents are right, given that they themselves are the product of the kind of education they received and that they differ drastically from one another. Yet their ideas and beliefs can affect their children's relationship with their school and their classmates – especially if school staff members are not allowed to question or challenge these external sources of information.

Nevertheless, the influence of parents was less apparent in interviews with group B (aged 14-17). Indeed, external sources of information for this older age group have been transferred from the parents and are replaced by the Internet. The participant profiles, including the ages in both groups, show that they are still under the information processing stage of perception formation.

From this data and the literature review, I deduce that restricting external sources of information is not healthy for forming perceptions and beliefs. The influence of the

information processing approach used throughout the school curriculum is negative for three reasons. Restrictions on external sources of information inside the school do not completely prevent exposure to them outside the school environment; at best, they delayed the inevitable exposure to them. Most of the exposure outside the school is unsupervised by educational institutions, which can lead to a high risk of internalising misleading information. Moreover, misleading information can be harmful, either as a result of being unrestricted on the Internet, being too ideologised in television programs, or because it is left unattended and unquestioned due to the influence of parental beliefs, their qualifications, and their level of openness to this type of discussion with their daughters. Finally, misleading information without supervision can result in an unhealthy development of perceptions, as many students have not acquired the necessary degree of critical skills needed to discern the usefulness and validity of presented information.

The above data shows that exposure to a wider range and volume of information inside the school environment is necessary for the formation of religious perceptions in a protected and balanced environment that encourages, or at least allows, debate. The implementation of supervision as an alternative to authoritarian restrictions could lead to a better information-processing approach among students.

In conclusion, the majority of students were found to search for information outside the school environment. To place things into perspective, however, it must be emphasised that the information provided by the curriculum is still immensely influential. Thus, it can be argued that students inside the school are divided between two categories: those who form their ideological perceptions through the information

provided by the curriculum in addition to external information sources, and those who acquire undeveloped religious perceptions due to restricted external information presented within the school environment. In other words, some students were restricted to the teachings of the curriculum, and others were exposed to unsupervised and potentially misleading external information. A healthy development of perceptions was absent due to the lack of access to external information within the school environment. The provision of access to external information would protect students from harmful information, or at least validate or discredit other sources of information by facilitating meaningful discussion and debates.

An overview of this theme divides students into two categories:

- students with a definite set of religious perceptions
- students with unsupervised religious perceptions resulting from the internalisation of information outside the school environment, usually through traditional media or the influence of parental beliefs.

The first category is defined in two ways. On the one hand, there are students affected by the selective interpretations in the internal source of information; *i.e.* through the curriculum. They usually internalise single religious interpretation of the curriculum as their only source of information. On the other hand, many student perceptions are forged as a result of restricted external sources of information, usually limited to highly ideologised television programs. On the contrary, students with unsupervised exposure usually showed a strong openness to the external source of information, and, due to the nature of the Internet and the social background of the parents, often experience a sense of confusion or rejection regarding the teachings of the curriculum.

The curriculum's approach to teaching is characterised not only by its limiting of student access to information and its deliberate use of a single interpretative framework, as demonstrated in this section, but it also uses the technique of role modelling. This entails the setting forth of idealised representations of Muslims to provide examples to follow, in order to transmit ideologised values to Saudi students, as will be demonstrated below.

7.3. Role Modelling

> "Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me the truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever." - Indian Proverb (Green, 2004, p.343)

The restriction of the information provided and its effect on the construction of perception is affected by another determinant factor: the introduction of role models and idealized heroes throughout the curriculum, wherever possible. This refers to the way in which the school curriculum portrays and outlines certain characters, and presents their qualities, and expects students to learn from their behaviour. Simply stated, students are encouraged to imitate the good examples and to reject the fact that they are human beings. Fairy tales made education, if you will. In the context of this research and the Saudi educational framework, most of these role models are characters of a religious nature and origin.

Story telling plays a key role in this study as most of the prophet's sayings and the description of his companions – Alsahaba[17] – are illustrated in lively stories to make them more memorable. The aim of the textbook is to help students visualize the characters of Alsahaba so that they can remember them easily. These imaginative representatives of some key characters of Alsahaba live with the students forever. The characters of Alsahaba are mainly portrayed as role models and the perfect examples of good Muslims.

Role modelling is an important element in the learning process. In Greco-Roman and medieval traditions, philosophers and teachers practiced what they preached. They assigned a major role to learning from observation and imitation, especially of symbolic models responsible for raising the next generation and developing or refining complex skills in adults (Bahn & Bahn, 1970; Clark, 1957; Rosenthal and Bandura, 1978). Applied intuitively, modelling techniques were seen as obvious tools to guide, redirect, and educate people (Rosenthal and Bandura, 1978). In this research, the use of role modelling has been observed in the Islamic teachings through both direct and indirect statements. For instance, a text directly states that the Prophet (PBUH) and Alsahaba are role models for Muslims. This, I believe, is a positive example of role modelling for students. The process of elevating the Prophet (PBUH) and Alsahaba to the position of role model for every Muslim has been approved in most Islamic texts. The power of the role models comes from the students being able to identify with them and thereby remember key elements of their character in their personal lives. However, my observations highlighted two flaws in the role modelling

[17] Alsahaba (the plural of Sahabi: masculine or Sahabia: feminine): The first generation of Muslim men and women, those who were contemporaneous with the Prophet (PBUH) (Khalid and Aliwa, 2003)

process within the curriculum: its idealism and its tendency to project misleading illustrations. These flaws are observed below.

7.3.1. Role modelling through "idealising"

As a philosophical concept, idealism has been assigned different meanings and has been extensively debated among philosophers. As exciting as it would be to engage in this philosophical debate, it is not the point of this research. In the course of this analysis, the aim is not to investigate idealism as a philosophical concept but to see it as a more practical concern. The aim of the following is to relate the consequences of (role modelling through idealising) to the fundamental connection among the participating students. The connection observed is between the Islamic role model and the reality of the student with regards to her Islamic identity. As a point of clarification, and for the sake of simplicity, it should be noted that *idealising* is defined in this research as perfection and the belief in an unrealistic set of qualities. The analysis of both interview and observation data shows that the idealization of the ultimate goal, embodied by the Islamic role models in the textbooks, creates a fundamental disconnect between the Islamic text and the real world of the student. Students are expected to identify with non-characters – super-humans whose qualities cannot be imitated fully.

Role models are predominantly portrayed in this context as idealized people and described as perfect characters. This ignores the concept that perfection in other places of the curriculum is defined as an adjective reserved exclusively for Allah. Nevertheless, the textbook offers an understanding of the age of Alsahaba as a fictional environment, which leads to a separation from the external reality that is

expected to prepare students to define their value as Muslims. In fact, the general definition of the *Sahabi* throughout the curriculum revolves around the idea that he or she never committed any sins, nor did he or she ever make a single mistake. Thus, the concept of the good Muslim has been associated with an unrealistic role model. Anything short of perfection is unquestionably bad as a result.

However, in other interpretative sources of the Islamic texts a different picture is drawn. Instead of being represented as perfectly and everlastingly faultless 'super-humans', Alsahaba are simply defined as people who lived in the age of the prophet and supported him. This does not imply that they are not of great value or undeserving. Quite the opposite, they are depicted as having been promised the highest level of reward in the afterlife. Their humanity and natural fallibility is portrayed alongside their ability for repentance. Quite simply, they are defined as follows:

"Once a male or female Muslim has seen Muhammad only for a short time, no matter whether he/she is a child or an adult, he/she is called from Al Sahaba with the proviso of dying as a believer… is a Sahaba." (Smart.whad.org, 2015).

Once again, this is an example of the way in which the Saudi curriculum selects a single source of interpretation and twists the religious texts in a way that is not only biased but also detrimental to the personal development of the student. Moreover, the unrealistic and, indeed, unrealizable representations of the role model create isolation between the way in which the student truly values herself as a Muslim and the realistic measures for such valuations. Unrealistic role models often lead to radical assessment: you are either a good or a bad Muslim. You are a good Muslim if you do

everything the models would do, which in this situation equate to attaining perfection. This Manichean vision excludes the entire spectrum that should exist between two poles. Therefore, the isolation between the value being gauged and the reference points against which they are measured lead to different reactions among students. Some are positive, some less so.

Acceptance and belief are the positive senses. They are expressed through phrases, such as "love", "look up to", "want to be like", "I believe", and "I respect". For example, two students gave the following accounts:

> "I love them and I try my best to be as good as them"
>
> - Kawthar
>
> "I want to be like Alsaida Aisha (RA)" (referring to one of prophet's wives presented in the literature review).
>
> - Amani

I would argue, however, that even though these feelings are generally deemed positive, here they related to a positive illusion. Due to the idealistic presentation of the role models in the textbook, fulfilment is associated with idealistic, as opposed to realistic, perceptions of one's own value as a Muslim. All ten students interviewed presented the positive sense within their statements. Yet, eight students highlighted the illusion present in this sense. Idealism differs from reality in that, although beautiful, its main characteristic is that it is unachievable. Because idealized values are expected of the students, it is an unrealistic approach, which can lead to negative reactions. In fact, the eight students expressed such feelings as disappointment at

oneself, lack of confidence in achieving an unattainable goal, including feelings associated with guilt and low self-esteem. Responses included expressions such as "but we can't", "we can't be as perfect", "I wish", "we can't compare", "will never be", and "no way".

> "They are the heroes of Islam; we will never be like them."
>
> - Salma
>
> "We can't compare them with normal people from our age."
>
> - Ibtihal
>
> "Whenever I listen to their stories I feel guilty about not being as good as they are."
>
> - Afaf:

The above quotations suggest that an over-idealized approach with regard to role modelling transformed the positive attachments into negative ones. Moreover, positive sentiments about role models became negative feelings about the private self in the process. Acceptance and beliefs are injected with guilt and low self-esteem. What used to be positive sentiments directed towards external figures became an internal process of self-blame and other types of negative feelings directed at the private self. Although the first reaction is considered positive, both reactions are linked and seen as unhealthy with regards to the students' connection with real life. It is one thing to respect, admire, and accept a role model for his or her unflinching determination and perfection. However, it is a widely different task to aim at perfection for oneself by denying every instance of weakness, and often, this leads to the negative feelings noted above.

On the other hand, as found throughout the analysis, some students who were exposed to the media expressed healthier attitudes towards the role modelling process of the prophet (PBUH) and Alsahaba. For example, in the quotation below, a student expressed an extended knowledge of her role models. This student chose to answer my question about her opinion about Alsahaba from her external sources of information, which in this case was supervised by her mother:

> "We know little about Alsahaba from school. There is a very interesting TV series about them that I bought on DVD. In each episode, the scholar talks about each one of them, his or her character, specialty, uniqueness and how they contributed to our religion and the world as human beings."
>
> - Rasha

Another student mentioned a specific TV show called "Qur'an stories" by Dr. Amr Khaled, interestingly, the main idea of this show was focused on the moral lessons not only of prophets but normal people as well.

The above quotation is important in three regards:

- the media, as noted previously, competes against the school curriculum as a source of information and a trigger for the re-formation of religious perceptions

- the media present the role models in a more realistic way as more human and adaptable to the current time
- most interestingly, the character of the role models in the media has been defined as unique, with a high level of individuality: there is no single mould for a good Muslim

The final point cited above will be developed further in the upcoming subsection alongside issues surrounding the role modelling process in the educational system. Furthermore, not content with presenting and endorsing unrealistic models, the curriculum also puts forward and advocates unhealthy messages, as shown below.

7.3.2. Misled-illustration – weakness and destitution as a 'good' Islamic identity

The observations of the textbook indicate a misleading illustration of Alsahaba. Most of the characters of Alsahaba are described as destitute people who wear old and worn-out clothing, who do not have food in their houses, and who accept whatever life would offer, given their state of destitution. Thus, many students adopt the following belief from observing the role model: poor and weak people are better Muslims than rich and strong people are. The issue here is not whether poverty and weakness are positive or negative values, but whether these values are based on a true depiction of Alsahaba, or whether they were based on a misguided depiction, and whether there is a reason behind the implementation of such values.

A clear example of the misleading illustration of Islamic identity through a role model is given below, presented in the classrooms. The 'I' persona is the prophet himself. The prophet's voice is borrowed to promote a misguided message.

"اطلعت في الجنة فرأيت أكثر أهلها الفقراء " رواه مسلم

Figure 15 Misinterpreted message 1

Translation: "I've been shown Paradise, and I've seen most of its inhabitants are from the poor people"

"أسرع الناس دخولاً الى الجنة الفقراء "

Figure 16 Misinterpreted message 2

Translation: "The people who enter Paradise faster are the poor people"

However, texts that encourage strength, power, and wealth within the Islamic identity are marginalized. Below is an example from the prophet's sayings that are not present in the classroom lessons:

المؤمن القوي خير وأحب إلى الله من المؤمن الضعيف وفي كل خير

Figure 17 Misinterpreted message 3

Translation: "The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, and in both there is goodness"

7.4 Conclusion

From this exploration of the presentation and extolling of role-model type characters, we observe that the curriculum, whether purposefully or otherwise, preaches misguided or partial versions of truths and messages by modifying the original emphasis and context of important information regarding the prophet and his companions. The curriculum presents the latter as perfect beings that set unrealistic moral goals. Moreover, the curriculum gives a misguided view on what makes a good Muslim. My observations show that, as a result of the shortcomings of the curriculum, the process of role modelling leads to the majority of students believing that a good Muslim must be weak and poor, while a minority believe that rich and strong Muslims are bad by definition. Moreover, there was a surprising absence of students claiming that the weak and poor could be bad, or that the rich and strong could be good. But should, and would, every student only be a passive receiver of an education that has clear flaws? This question also hinges upon another essential aspect of individuality, which is the degree to which students listen, internalize, and respond to external authorities. It brings me to the next and final chapter in the development of Saudi female individuality in the physical environment, which focuses on the difficulties born of divisions between the endorsed views of the various authority figures, and the degree to which Saudi women are allowed agency and authorship.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONTRASTING AUTHORITIES

8.1. Introduction

Thus far, my analysis of Saudi female individuality involved close examinations of the physical environment of Saudi society through the educational system at the origins of the various types of female identities observed in Saudi women, according to Castells' theory as reviewed in Chapter 3. Moreover, I have also concluded on the ways in which perceptions are built based on the foundations laid by the previous chapters. I will now discuss the development of female individuality in relation to contrasting authorities.

In every individual, there is the dynamic interplay of external authorities and self-authority. In society, no one can be absolutely and totally free and independent. As long as individuals are submitted to a set of social institutions, they become a stage for the interplay between internal and external authorities. Saudi Arabian girls are no exception. This thesis focuses on the contrast between the authority of the student as an agent and the external authorities. The latter express themselves in two ways: in the school environment through the educator (the teacher, the school principal, the social advisor) and in the textbook through the religious concepts.

An observation of the data in relation to authorities highlights an educational system that positions against self-authorship in three ways:

- by forcing students to follow external formulas.
- through the conflict between duty and pleasure, and the overwhelming victory of duty if one is to be a good Muslim.
- in the insistence on the essential nature and superiority of the male guardian.

Each of these points will be explored below to show how, as a whole, they complicate the process of the development of individuality for Saudi women.

8.2. Following External Formulas

Self-authorship, as explained by Magolda, is composed of four phases. These are necessary in order to achieve a healthy development of female individuality. Consulting Magolda's theory in this theme, participants were found to be heavily reliant on phase one of self-authorship. This consists of following external formulas given by the school and its staff. What students believe, how they define themselves, and what is important in the relationships they have, are all determined by the external authority.

Magolda's theory proposes that in order to achieve self-authorship, one must develop the four following phases:

- Following formulas
- Crossroads
- Becoming the author of one's life
- Internal foundation

This prominent external authority represents the educational environment as a whole, originating with the teacher and extending to the entire educational staff. Furthermore, textbooks fuel the over implementation of phase (1). In fact, the power and the nature of the school environment are dictated by the curriculum. According to Magolda, following external formulas is a required phase in order to move through the second and third stages to self-authorship. There is no possibility of leaping over certain stages. The development is incremental. The second phase in Magolda's theory is called crossroads. It is defined as a phase of relinquishing the external authority. Simultaneously, students begin to replace it with their own internal voice. However, in this research, the concern was raised regarding the over implementation of phase 1, which prevented the students from moving forward to the second and third phases to achieve effective self-authorship.

Some studies suggest that in many classrooms, both the teacher and the student view the teacher as the person with all the authority (Delpit, 1988; Tan, 2004; Roepnack, 2008). Although Tablulawa (2004) argues that students have more power than commonly believed, and the argument that students have and express authority through passive resistance is an influential one (Roepnack, 2008), this thesis presents a less optimistic outlook. In my observation of teacher and student attitudes towards rules and authority in the classroom, each teacher was found to be using the power given by her authority by adapting her own technique in directing the class and preparing the class schedule and environment. Therefore, she managed to direct her students' attention to the content of the curriculum in her own way, using the power given to her by her position and responsibility. Despite these differences in

techniques, which allow for some flexibility in the teaching process and content, all of them were over-implementing phase one as previously explained. They relied heavily on the power of their authority to make students follow rules, instead of adopting a more lenient and explanatory approach.

The general sense we get from the following analysis is that rules are not followed because of an internal belief in their intrinsic value and positive contribution with regard to student development. This feeling of inner satisfaction at learning rules for their inherent value cannot be consciously created by the students for themselves: their teachers must guide them in the process. Not allowing the students to internalize rules and the rationales behind them perpetuates the same pattern of confusion and refusal or rejection: they do what is asked without understanding why it has been asked in the first place. If the teacher does not explain the value of rules, the students will rarely, if ever, work it out on their own, which in turn leads to a sense of confusion and rules being followed purely because the teacher wants them to be followed. Hence, once the authority is absent, the rules are not followed. Below are further explorations of the interactions of authorities in the classrooms.

Ms. Maha practiced her authority in the classroom verbally with what I considered an aggressive tone. I have attended 5 lessons by Ms. Maha, when I attended her class on a subject, *Tawheed,* with students from group A (aged 10-13), I encountered the following scene:

Students talking to each other loudly, and movements and laughter were included. Out of 29 students in the class, I noticed two quiet students sitting at their own desks,

looking down at their notebooks waiting for the class to begin. When Ms. Maha entered the classroom, nothing changed until the teacher shouted: "Quiet! Quiet! Everyone in her own place, we want to begin the class." Each student went to her own place quietly and the lesson started smoothly.

What was noteworthy in Ms. Maha's class was not the authority's attitude, but the students' attitude towards the rules. Most of the students in the classroom responded to the authority's presence, embodied by the appearance of Ms. Maha. Only two out of twenty-nine students in Ms. Maha's class behaved according to the rules without the need for an external source of authority to intervene to make them behave. In later interviews with the two students, I asked them the reason they sat quietly. Rasha said, "Because I want the lesson to begin." Her action was thus driven by internal motivation rather than the intervention of an external authority. Haneen, the other quiet student, expressed her choice to remain silent by saying, "I love this class, and I enjoy listening to Ms. Maha." This shows that both students' actions were dictated by their own internal beliefs and thoughts, expressed through such expressions as, "I want to" and "I love to". The "I" persona here is the agent behind the actions I witnessed, and refers to these two students' own selves.

I am aware that these two responses are unique compared to the majority of student responses. However, it highlights the contrary motivations of the majority's attitudes. When I asked the rest of the class the reason why they eventually quieten down to allow the lesson to begin, most of them answered that it was because they were asked to do so by the figure of authority – the teacher. Ms. Maha's class is one example of the over-implementation of the external formula phase: students behaved in a certain

way because of what she embodies – authority, sanctions, fear of punishment – and not because of the value of the rules. Another observation, made during Ms. Huda's class, further supports this claim. In Ms. Huda's classroom, five students were prepared to begin the lesson without the need for the teacher's orders, and twenty-seven students expressed resistance to sitting down quietly until the figure of authority demanded it. Interviews with the five students gave similar answers about the reason behind their behaviours. For instance, Sandra said, "I wait for this lesson to start because I find it interesting," while Ebtisam said, "I pay attention because I love Ms. Huda." "I listen to her because she is not strict." In all of the five students' transcripts, we can find the use of the "I" persona. Therefore, the students were referring to themselves as the main reason for their attitudes and the main motor for their actions. On the other hand, the majority provided answers that included the words "she" – referring to the teacher – and "rules" – referring to the external formula.

Only a minority of the students was categorized in my observation as students behaving by listening to their own internal beliefs and thoughts, which help develop their inner voices and meaning in order to make and support their own decisions. In addition, they learn to gain an understanding of things happening around them based on their internal foundation in the self-authorship theory. This also means that they are better able to adapt to various situations using their internal store of values. On the other hand, the majority were students who behaved only by following external formulas without any internal belief to support their behaviour. They merely followed the rules as an end in itself.

Ms. Maha and Ms. Huda's classrooms are two examples that indicate the over-implementation of the "external formula" phase – i.e. phase 1. However, I was not fully convinced that they provided enough evidence. Instead, I considered their teachings as indications for further analysis. Therefore, I made another classroom observation with Ms. Roqaya. This further strengthened my view. In my observation, she was even more aggressive than Ms. Maha was. The following scenario illustrates the attitude of Ms. Roqaya and one of the students in (group A), Mariam, in a Qur'an class. It also shows how the over-implementation of external formulas without an internal belief could also create an internal conflict among students, and Mariam was a clear example for this conflict:

> Ms. Roqaya enters the class and shouts, "Quiet! It's Qur'an time, so I don't want to hear the sound of anyone breathing, or else..." (Note: In Ms. Roqaya's statement, she used the sound of breathing as a metaphor for silence, which is considered an advanced metaphor for the students' age). Everyone was quiet within seconds. A few seconds later, Mariam, an 11-year-old student, asked, "Teacher, teacher, but how do we live if we don't breathe? I need to breathe in order to survive." The teacher responded in an aggressive way. "Don't try to be funny, just be quiet Mariam." The class started while Mariam's facial expression was still full of confusion, signalling questions that went unanswered by the teacher.

Mariam's unanswered questions became nothing less than a big, confused, question mark in her mind – about both her question and the reason behind the teacher's

outrage. Thus, Mariam was stuck in phase 1 of self-authorship. When I asked her about the reason behind her questions, she said, "I wasn't trying to be funny, but I found it interesting to create a conversation about the possibility of living without breathing. I really wanted to know if it's possible to do that! Is it? Why would I do it, if it's not good for my health?" Her complaint about the reason why she should adopt a certain action without her internal belief strikes at the heart of Ms. Roqaya's deficiency, and that of a system over-emphasizing the formula-following phase of development. Indeed, she asked a fundamental question: why should she do things she does not believe in merely because they were harshly imposed through a teacher's authority?

The main concern from the above scenarios is the highlighted students' conflict in moving from phase 1; following external formulas without questioning, to phase 2; questioning accepted beliefs and sensing the dissonance between external responsibility and internal voices. My observations show that the majority of students, throughout their learning experience, are programed to follow authority without considering their own internal beliefs. This leads us to speculate whether this way of teaching is mostly due to the teacher's own technique, or whether it is a result of the Ministry of Education's promotion through the curriculum. In addition, another aspect factors in the appearance of student self-authorship: the exploration, within the school curriculum, of the possible conflicts between the notions of duty and pleasure.

8.3. Duty versus Pleasure

A general overview of the textbooks, as well as the last section, suggest that the motive behind the instilling of religious values among students is related to a

prioritization of duty over pleasure. The textbook is another source of influence on student self-authorship development; its analysis indicates that most of the dialogues in the texts are presented as vertical dialogues, without including the rationale behind the majority of the religious values. Perhaps the teachers' imposition of their power of authority is a reflection of the types of relationships and discussions displayed in the curriculum. The question and answer exercises in the textbooks and the language used within the curriculum convey the feeling that the motivation behind religious behaviours is largely contingent to the side of duty. This is coupled with a narrowing of the pleasure side. In other words, you must do what you are told to do because it is your duty, and whether you understand the reasoning behind following those duties is secondary to you following them.

The dynamics between duty and pleasure, and the overwhelming victory of the former, is highlighted in the focus on *Fiqheyyat*, meaning the "dos" and "don'ts" of the practical side of the daily Muslim rituals, such as prayer positions. This focus does not only exist in the *Fiqh* subject. It is also noticed in the rest of the Islamic studies subjects such as *Tawheed* and *Hadeeth*. In other words, the textbooks show a strong focus on duties and a subsequent marginalization of the pleasure side of Islam. The reasons behind these orders are neglected, while the orders are repeated across many different classes. The practical knowledge of the dos and don'ts is indeed important. The following Image (figure 19), for instance, shows the difference between the correct (left side) and the incorrect (right side) position of the foot when praying, which is a practical aspect that accompanies the duty of the prayer.

Figure 18 The difference between the correct and the incorrect position in prayers

Admittedly, the right–hand image can be a more comfortable position. In fact, one cannot ignore the absence of the pleasure side in the required position for the five Muslim prayers to be conducted properly. From a health perspective, however, medical researchers demonstrated the benefits of a specific prayer position or period on the body muscles and the heart. Specialists from the Jordanian Association of Cardiologists have stated and emphasized that the daily observation of the *Fajr Salah*[18] at its appointed time is the best protection and remedy for heart diseases and arteriosclerosis, including myocardial infarction, which is responsible for causing cardiac arrest (heart attacks), and arteriosclerosis, which leads to strokes. (Islamicstudies.islammessage, 2014). Mentioning such motivations would add a rational value to the prescribed behaviour and increase commitment to religious values, yet it appears nowhere in the curriculum.

Not only do the curriculum and teachers' attitudes ignore the rational aspect of religious practices, but sometimes they also have a negative effect on the spiritual teachings of the Islamic religion. The following scene is a perfect illustration of the way in which a teacher's behaviour can attach negative sentiments to a positive,

[18] *Fajr Salah*: early morning/dawn prayer.

spiritual experience. It arises from the observation of noon prayer time at the school. The scene was explored further in interviews with 10 students and the teacher.

At noon prayers break[19], the corridor that leads to the classrooms was full of students talking and laughing. Ms. Roqaya enters and starts clapping and shouting, "Girls! To the prayer room! To the prayer room! Five marks off midterm exams for those who don't go and pray!" She kept shouting loudly for approximately two minutes until she managed to get most of the students to the prayer room.

Ms. Roqaya's attitude was contrary to building the value of the religious practice – prayer – among students for two reasons. Firstly, the tone of her clapping and shouting indicated two negative habits towards prayers. Thereby, she instilled fear of her authority and simultaneously lessened the trust and attention paid to the praying experience itself. Moreover, her behaviour generated a side effect to the act of praying, which is the imposition of duty. Because of the threat of punishment, the act of praying became a practical concern. The spiritual part – associated with pleasure – was ignored. Secondly, the threat of taking marks off from midterm exams associated the value of prayers to materialistic motivations. It replaced the core spiritual reward of prayers on a personal level. Thus, the core meaning and value of Muslim prayers were associated among most of the students either with negative habits or with materialistic values – a prayer was worth five marks.

In fact, the responses from the 10 students I interviewed afterwards confirmed that Ms. Roqaya's behaviour became an obstacle to the transmission of the true value of

[19] Noon prayers' break: noon prayers are one of the five daily prayers in Islam. The noon prayers' break is an official (30 minutes) break in all Saudi schools.

religious practices as spiritual experiences. For the sake of subject sensitivity and research reliability, I did not ask any direct questions regarding the negative association instilled by Ms. Roqaya, and it is assumed that the underlying materialistic motivation or negative habits towards the practice will never be mentioned among students. However, I decided to ask the students indirectly about the motivation and the value of prayers. Most of them did not describe the value of prayers from its spiritual side. Moreover, they did not mention pleasure as a personal motivation behind the practice. Most of the responses included words associated with the weight of duty and the fear of punishment, such as, "Because I have to pray", "an obligation", "it's *Fardh*[20]", "it's the second pillar of Islam", and even sharper answers such as "because those who don't pray go to hell". Therefore, the curriculum, as well as the school staff responsible for teaching its content, focus on transmitting religious practices as a set of duties one cannot avoid, rather than as experiences rewarding in and of themselves, with rationales behind them.

8.4. Conclusion

Chapters 7 and 8 sought to research the channels through which Saudi girls' perceptions are formed. Three main ways have been identified:

- The selectiveness and limitedness of the school curriculum, which led to many students seeking information in the traditional media in an unsupervised way.

[20] *Fardh*: meaning duty, it is one of the five types of obligations in Fiqh.

- The importance of role modelling because of religious characters personifying certain values to perfection, thereby instilling negative feelings of disappointment, discouragement, and low self-esteem in certain students at their inability to conform to the norms. Moreover, the mis-illustration of the role models within the curriculum sometimes also promoted misguided values, which competed to create unbalanced and unhealthy perceptions and beliefs in the students
- The prominence of external sources of authority as opposed to the students' own capacity for self-authorship, explored through the attitude of Saudi teachers and the content of the curriculum, promoting vertical dialogues and the importance of duty as opposed to pleasure.

It should be noted that, as shown in chapters 6, 7 and 8, that my observations have clearly identified an intellectual and practical dead-end: students appreciate the importance of religion in their lives and the shaping of their identities. Their faith is beyond question and the value of this religious education is beyond the scope of this research. Yet it is under a religious mantle that the ministry and the curriculum seek to impose the public disappearance of women, and to build female individuality based on their key element. Hence, students who might disagree with such treatment of their gender do so not because they lose faith in their religion, but because of the mis-interpretations of its sources (Qur'an and Sunna). However, due to the nature of the curriculum, there is little opportunity for these students to find other channels to receive information in order to build a different set of religious perceptions as those instilled by the ministry. On the one hand, they are disillusioned and eager to preserve their faith by overcoming the obstacle of the curriculum, but on the other, they are

limited by the curriculum they cannot escape. Therefore, a third party is needed in this dynamics of power. This third party, which I identify as the new social media, and Twitter in particular, and which is developed in the next chapter, will allow Saudi women to finally be given the right to gain knowledge concerning issues surrounding gendered identity within their own world. In fact, if anything, it gives them the confidence and courage to look for the answers they were not given in their educational experience. With this in mind, I now move on to the next chapter, which examines the impact of Twitter on female individuality in Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER NINE: SAUDI WOMEN AND TWITTER

9.1 Introduction

Working from the framework developed within the previous chapters in regards to the context, perceptions and formation of female individuality, this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the effect of social media on Saudi society, and more specifically of the Twitter platform on Saudi female users. This is an important question as, regardless of the varying opinions and stances in regards to the advantages and disadvantages of the new social media discussed in the literature review, everyone uniformly agrees on the presence of a deep and meaningful change within the current digital age because of them. This change can be characterized as a fundamental shift in the way we, as humans, now live and envision our lives. Observations have revealed a veritable wealth of crucial social, religious, and political events related to Saudi women occurring around the world, that have been related in one way or another to Twitter. A non-exhaustive list could include, for instance: women's campaigns for the right to drive, and *Fatwas* related to gender issues.

Twitter is the new environment on which to debate such issues. It also allows a broader access to information and opportunities for individuals to adopt and build on these undeniably daring views, and to partake in debates relating to or involving the world at large. The new social media therefore influences the political authority's decisions that affect not only the physical society, but also the new strategies and policies of the Saudi state towards women. Now, within the context of this discussion,

a critical observer must remain cautious: in the myriad discussions revolving around these concepts, it is easy to lose sight of the central issues relating to the new social media. The emphasis must therefore be carefully maintained on the notions related to gendered identity and education. Amongst those issues, a central one is that of an accurate appreciation of the impact of Twitter on the development of Saudi female individuality. Without succumbing to the sirens of sensationalism, I will rather seek, in this chapter, to determine to what extent the introduction of Twitter affects Saudi female individuality.

This part of the research will present findings of semi-structured interviews with Saudi women that illustrate the influence of Twitter on their lives as Muslims. In this chapter, I argue that the influence of Twitter is noticeable in several ways: first, it led to a redefining of the female identity to its core. Second, it encourages the reformation of previously deep-rooted and ill-defined socio-religious perceptions born of the educational system examined previously. Third, this shift in women's perceptions of certain socio-religious concepts has led to a transformation of women's behaviour towards *Fatwas*. Finally, Twitter has helped fuel reconsideration of the monopoly of authority as traditionally defined. Consequently, Twitter can thus be described as an open window for socio-religious reforms through the creation of a new virtual-based self-analytic and self-critical society, as a mirror to and lobbyist for change in the real world.

My task begins with the study's fundamental question: How could Twitter, as a new social media platform, influence the fundamental shaping of Saudi women's individuality, in opposition to the anti-feminist educational background as presented

in the previous chapters? The main aim of this section is to present the findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with female Saudi college students and graduates. The reason for undertaking these analyses is to gain an understanding of the interaction between the impact of Twitter and the Islamic curriculum on gender, and more specifically, the development of female individuality in Saudi Arabia.

Due to the centrality of the perceptions taught in school, observations in this study are focused on specific concepts in relation to the school curriculum. To answer the central question of this thesis. The primary aim of the data analyses presented here is to examine the possible interaction between Twitter and the religious curriculum within the context of the formation and re-formation of identity, religious concepts, behaviours, and authorities in relation to Saudi women. In order to gain a better grasp of the wider context of this theme, I consulted and analysed related studies and papers in other Arab countries and in Saudi Arabia. This part of the research will mainly examine the following questions:

1. How could the nature of the environment in the use of Twitter by Saudi women influence their understanding of female individuality and identity as previously taught in the religious curriculum?

2. Has the intensified nature of communication and information born of Twitter changed or reformed women's understanding of Islamic concepts as taught in schools?

3. How could political, religious, and social authorities interact on the Twitter platform to forge the individuality of Saudi women?

The answers to these questions revolve around a shift in the nature of the environment from the previous research setting: I move away from schools as limited, physical entities, toward a virtual platform, i.e., Twitter. As observed, this shift influences the development of female individuality in Saudi society.

The hypothesis is that Twitter offers a virtual environment that provides Saudi female users with an alternative to the real world. In this alternative world, they are given the choice to create intellectual representations of themselves that challenge what they were taught traditionally at school. Instead of "invisibility", they are given a platform from which to voice their opinions and to learn about topics that the school curriculum purposefully omits. In other words, if they so choose, they can be their true selves in an unreal, virtual space where they interact with other users and discover new perspectives. This was the predicted finding.

I later observed that this virtual world has achieved even more than was I able to predict, given the literature on the topic. Indeed, Twitter has moved beyond merely reflecting the reality of Saudi society, by showing the real world a more faithful image of itself. In this hyperspace, the very definition of female identity has changed. Furthermore, it has had a tremendous impact on the physical life of Saudi female users. Indeed, by creating a space that allows for the creation of a 'virtual reality', if you will, Twitter has helped reshape women's outlook on issues of female empowerment. In other words, because female users are given more rights and

autonomy on Twitter, they seek to transcribe this newly acquired level of independence and recognition to the physical society within Saudi Arabia. These results were somewhat unexpected.

Prior to presenting my analysis, it is necessary to define the difference between reality and the 'virtual reality' world. Here, real and unreal spaces relate to the concept of utopia. 'Utopia' is a term first used by Sir Thomas More, who defined it as a society possessing highly desirable qualities that attempt to create an ideal world (Kumar,1991). Related studies on the effects of virtual reality suggest that a virtual reality has a hugely negative influence on defining identity for several reasons, the more common of which are that a virtual reality:

- a virtual environment where the individual could be and act as anyone, and thus loses the sense of the uniqueness of his or her true self, unlike in reality where the individual is able to present only his real character
- creates isolation between the individual and other individuals in society while, in reality, the individual remains connected to his or her peers through social, educational, or professional events with real people
- a form of escapism for most of its users. It provides a platform for users to flee urgent social issues and life challenges that may be affecting them in the real life

Bearing in mind the three points above, the influence of Twitter in Saudi Arabia leads to contrary conclusions for several reasons. When examining the virtual reality of Twitter in comparison to the real world of Saudi females, my analysis shows the following:

- The real society of Saudi Arabia is a vertical collectivist / masculine environment where women are assigned to someone else's name and authority, largely mainly under male guardianship. As such, they already lose a sense of the uniqueness of their true self. However, in the virtual reality provided by Twitter, female users are able to present their real characters and express their beliefs and feelings while using their own names and voices.

- The real society of Saudi Arabia is an isolated, exclusive, and inward-looking society, where human interaction is restricted and limited. However, in the virtual reality of Twitter, all people can connect and interact on any topic without social, traditional, religious, or political restrictions.

- The real society of Saudi Arabia does not tolerate discussion of sensitive social issues. As a result, most individuals refrain from discussing current events and life challenges for traditional, social, and political reasons. However, in the virtual reality offered by Twitter, they are more open to reflect, analyse, and even develop

strategic solutions for social charity, awareness campaigns, and many other social development activities.

These three points are explored throughout the development of various themes that include the redefining of Saudi women, issues pertaining to the monopoly of authorities, the transformation in regard to reactions to *Fatwas*, and the reforming of perceptions.

The aforementioned themes are examined individually before conclusions can be drawn on the effect of Twitter on Saudi women's ideas and perceptions of their own sense of individuality.

9.2 Redefining Identity: Affecting Physicality through the Virtual World.

To understand the impact of the virtual reality of Twitter on Saudi female users, it is necessary to explore the ways in which Saudi women define their virtual identities on this virtual platform, and how this relates to their identity in the physical world. Whereas the latter is fundamentally influenced by the school environment and socially normative beliefs due to the content of the religious curriculum, Twitter, on the contrary, allows the participants the freedom to project a flexible image of themselves. In this theme's analysis, I first explore the participants' characters and self-definitions in the physical world before following up by presenting the ways in which Saudi women's definitions of themselves are shifting because of the virtual nature of Twitter and the type of intellectual learning and stimulation it offers.

9.2.1 The Legitimizing and the Resistant Identities

> "We're not men's slaves anymore; we're empowered by king Abdullah himself, and this empowerment comes from great investments in women's higher education. We as women are not going to accept what our education tried to teach us to accept."
>
> - Ghada

> "I didn't study abroad because my parents believed that a girl shouldn't live by herself without a male guardian"
>
> - Afnan

In a modern Japanese restaurant in Dubai, I met Ghada, a 25 year-old Saudi female lawyer, who recently graduated from a UK-based university with an MA degree in Islamic Law. I was waiting for her as she was running late, trying to find a parking spot for her sport Range Rover car – a car she cannot enjoy driving in her own country. She entered the restaurant carrying a stylish handbag, a black jacket, tight jeans, and shiny yellow shoes. "I'm sorry I am late, I don't usually have the Saudi lateness habit" – critical statements about Saudi society casually tossed into conversation – perhaps casual but rather telling behaviour. Her statement about lateness drew an interesting parallel with an unfortunately unsuccessful Skype interview plan with Afnan, a woman virtually standing as a direct opposite to the image of Ghada, as discussed below.

In the above episode, Ghada illustrates the "resistant identity" observed among Saudi women. This type of identity was highlighted in the school analysis in the previous

chapter as a minority and is defined as a rebellious, liberal, and cosmopolitan personality, which refused many of the socio-religious perceptions and boundaries that are transmitted through school curriculums in Saudi Arabia. This description is remarkably apt for Ghada's personality and behaviour. On the contrary, Afnan, a college student in Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, represents the "legitimizing identity". I met Afnan at a religious event in Jeddah in 2008. After rescheduling three times for an interview, she eventually failed to appear for the planned interview for unknown reasons. In 2008, on the day of our meeting, she wore the traditional black abaya with the black headscarf (V&A dress-code) showing her face without make up. She came from a conservative background that believed that a women's highest achievement is being a good, obedient wife, producing and raising children, and managing life matters within her house. This background had been developed and bolstered by a specific religious ideology instilled in the school curriculum, where she was taught that a woman's education is secondary and is a right only if granted by her male guardians.

Ghada is an example of the majority of women interviewed in this research in relation to self-definition. On the other hand, Afnan represents a unique case. However, considering both polar opposites' responses in the analysis is essential to illustrate the influence of the growing exposure to social media among Saudi women, and to allow an appropriate and constructive comparison. Afnan and Ghada illustrate the relation between the social media – here Twitter – and the contradictory images of identity observed previously. This relation is explored further below.

Afnan does not use Twitter. She rarely uses Facebook and she spends most of her

days between her studies and going out with friends and family, away from computer screens and especially social media. On the other hand, Ghada is an intensive Twitter user although her strong and independent individuality did not arise because of her exposure to Twitter. In effect, it is the result of many complex factors; mainly, the modern lifestyle adopted by her family, the support of her male guardian – her father – who lived outside Saudi society, and the higher education she gained in the UK under the (KASP)[21] program. Yet she had previously been subject to the misconceptions regarding women's rights and female development present in the religious curriculum of Saudi Arabia. Her personal and professional life, as well as her freedom in using Twitter, is still influenced by these socio-religious perceptions.

The contrasts in personalities between Ghada and Afnan show the great influence of the physical environment, specifically the educational environment, on their understanding of their female individuality and their physical identity in the public sphere. Interestingly, between these contradictory definitions of the self a new, transformative definition emerged from their use of Twitter, as will now be shown.

9.2.2 The Rise of a New Identity

The development of the female identity in the Saudi society was almost impossible without social media in general, and Twitter in specific. In spite of this, academics could argue that Twitter does not have the potential to encourage the development of the female identity without an effective curriculum reform in Saudi Arabia. Findings in this research prove that Twitter, to a certain extent, could participate in the development of the Saudi female individuality. This participation manifested itself

[21] See section 2.4.4

through the transformation of legitimizing identities into resistance and projected identities. In fact, the majority of women who participated in this study agreed that the virtual aspect of Twitter positively affected their conception of their own identity. Most respondents claimed that "the ability to create a Twitter account with the female user's real name" is an essential step forward in defining and expressing the individuality of every woman in Saudi Arabia. This argument is expanded in the following analysis.

Ghada and Afnan, the two contradictory individuals who were schooled within the same religious curriculum but raised by families with opposite perceptions towards women's development, represent the two opposite ends of the spectrum. Between these two extremes are many women with other types of identities. To discover more about these intermediate identities, I interviewed Dalia, Jumana, and Sultana, who provided new perspectives to the first research question. The women shared the same school education, family lifestyle, physical environment, and higher education background as Afnan. However, they differ from Afnan in that they share an understanding of female individuality similar to that of Ghada. Having said that, unlike Ghada, they cannot be considered in the category of a 'resistance identity', because they did not reject a single, or set of, ideologies as a whole, for philosophical reasons, the way Ghada does.

Interview findings showed that Dalia, Jumana, and Sultana have overcome the suppressive influential factors that they shared with Afnan on the definition of Muslim female identities. The three women expressed, in the following quotations, how their virtual identities on Twitter transformed their understanding and their definition of their identities as Saudi women in real life. Before presenting

participants' responses, it is important to stress again a point noted previously: Saudi society in the physical world is a vertical collectivist / masculine environment, where women are called by someone else's name (mainly the male guardian's) and they themselves possess a vague sense of uniqueness or distinctness regarding their true selves. On the other hand, in the virtual reality of Twitter, female users are able to use their real characters and express their beliefs and feelings using their real names, thereby owning their own thoughts and opinions, if they choose to. In fact, Twitter is significant in that it has afforded Saudi women the opportunity to express themselves and hold a physical as well as intellectual presence, should they wish to. The question of one's Twitter account name may seem insignificant, yet I argue that it is an important first step towards building a new identity, as is shown below with the interview responses gathered from Dalia and Jumana respectively.

> "The fact that I can create an account, use my real name, and express my opinion to the whole world and get responses, comments and get retweeted is a new experience that makes me feel like I have the right to have my own voice heard in the public sphere."
>
> - Dalia

> "Using my real name in Twitter makes me feel that I am more real than in reality."
>
> - Wed

> The third woman to whom I asked the same question about her Twitter name, answered with a slight laugh, "As silly as it sounds, it's proof that I exist."
>
> - Jumana

These striking answers in regards to the significance of Twitter account names leads me to contend that the dramatic shift achieved by the use of a virtual identity has facilitated the rise of a new definition of identity among Saudi women. However, the following statements from the minority raised a concern about the presentation of virtual identity.

Although data reveals that the majority of participants use their real names, Sultana mentioned that she uses a nickname on Twitter to express her thoughts freely in order to avoid harassment and insults. She stated:

> "I prefer using a nickname so I can say whatever I think. Realistically speaking, we are still a closed-minded society that will attack, abuse, and humiliate the person who has opposite or different opinions... It's not about my name – it's about what makes me tweet, the practice of being critical is what transformed my personality, so I don't care if my name is known. I care to keep my mind thinking and reflecting by interacting on Twitter."
>
> - Sultana

The above statement does signal minor constraints towards using real names in Twitter, such as online violence towards diverging opinions from users sharing

opposite beliefs. Despite the dangers in the use of Twitter in the form of cyber-bullying, and emotional and social abuse, building a virtual platform for sociability using the female users' real name is considered a positive phenomenon. This is further documented by the fact that a majority of the respondents in this research argued for a positive shift, while only a minority voiced concerns. Moreover, the use of one's real name is not only a sign of possessing one's own opinions, but also shows a willingness to open up and engage on an international, cosmopolitan platform, a possibility previously denied Saudi women by the physical society in which they grew up.

> "To know a woman's phone number used to be a socio-religious taboo, and it is still a socio-religious taboo among many people, as it was the only way to communicate with an individual, and it's considered a private direct communication between men and women. Now, on Twitter and in the social media in general, we get access to private direct communications by private messages. My Twitter account, with my full name, is a public address for the whole society and even the world to communicate with me"
>
> -Ghada

Although recent studies show a higher percentage of Twitter users are men, these do not counter the fact that the majority of responses indicate a stronger presence for Saudi women on Twitter. Only a small percentage of participants, such as Sultana, highlight the issue of using fake identities or nicknames in social media in general. Respondents related several influential social and political campaigns in Saudi Arabia

that were led by female users who used their real full names. The dramatic influence of presenting the female name in Twitter with limited constraints from the physical sphere was clear and direct among the participants. However, this is not sufficient evidence to shape a definition for the virtual identity among Saudi women. Therefore, the next section explores the development of intellectual identity in the context of Twitter.

9.2.3 Intellectual Identity in Twitter

The aim of this section is to explore another level of identity in Twitter – the intellectual level. The curriculum, as shown previously, encourages the idea that women lack intelligence and religious zeal and that, as a result, they must be dependent on their male guardians for any significant life decisions. I argue, in the next few paragraphs, that this antiquated definition of intellectual identity has been transformed (to an extent) using Twitter. This shift is a noticeable feature that was shared by 23 women, an overwhelming majority of the respondents.

Jumana belongs to the majority of respondents who used to think along traditional lines, believing that a woman does not necessarily have to be educated about current events and public affairs. As she grew up, she watched her father's interest in the news and his educating himself through the television and newspaper, whereas she never saw her mother reading the newspaper. In fact, she admitted that

> "...Until I turned 18, it had never crossed my mind that there are women who read the newspaper and have any basic awareness about current events."

She then explained the shift from her old perception to her new perception, built through Twitter:

> "Since I entered the world of Twitter, I've seen so many active Saudi women tweeting and debating events not only in Saudi Arabia but in the whole world. To me it was an enlightening process, as I never knew there were so many intelligent Saudi women."

She further added that she was currently awaiting a response to her application for an MA in International Relations, testifying to her interest in politics. Of course, she said, she applied at a foreign university, as Saudi universities do not offer this type of course to women. She further described her discovery through Twitter:

> "I consider myself an intensive reader on so many different topics, and I know we have female leaders in our history as Muslims. But the idea of being active in the public sphere for women nowadays did not cross my mind, as we've been taught that we are like diamonds and have to be protected and hidden all the time. The unrealistic virtual platform of Twitter made the idea of female involvement in the running of the world today closer to reality."

Interviews supported the fact that the majority of Saudi female users use Twitter to promote their intellectual identities by expressing challenging opinions under their real names. For instance, Manal Alsharif and Lujain Alhathlool led a driving campaign for women. Madawi Al-Rasheedtweets about freeing prisoners arrested for

voicing an opinion opposing the government or the state and, finally, Ensaf Haidar on freeing her husband, Raef Albadawi. I am aware that most of the women who challenged the political authority have either been arrested or banned from entering the country again if they live abroad. However, the point in this theme is that they did succeed in expressing their opinions using their real names as Saudi women and created an identity independent of the background influences and context provided by their education. The question of the role of authority, especially political, will be treated as an independent theme later in this chapter.

Moreover, the shift in defining intellectual identity is not limited to the virtual platform. Interestingly, the use of Twitter has equal repercussions in the physical world. Most of the participants interviewed expressed the notion that social media in general and Twitter in specific affected their definition of their identity in real life. The three examples below illustrate how the participating females adopted the new definition from the virtual world to the physical world:

> "It's a matter of self-validation as well. We cannot blame it all on the society. When I started tweeting my personal opinions about our society, I felt more confident to tell my opinions in social gatherings or small cultural events in real life. Before Twitter, I never trusted that people would be interested to hear what I think."
>
> - Jana

> "Sometimes at work, I hear some feedback from colleagues who are already following me. It often leads to a real chance to discuss a

> certain topic, and as a result my male colleagues have taken me more seriously than just as a woman"
>
> - Hanan[22]

> "After using Twitter, I've noticed a different look in people's eyes toward me, especially men in my family. This look has more respect, more validation in it. Sometimes this look is accompanied by a verbal compliment on my tweets, some with a challenging question, out of interest to open a debate with me, as if they are saying, "we know you better now and we are impressed that you are that intellectual."
>
> – Hala

Indeed, as the participants indicated, self-validation, confidence, respect, and appreciation are important factors that could shape one's intellectual identity in both worlds. These participants could not find these factors in the physical world before using Twitter. Thus, in order to fight for these factors in the physical environment as well, there was a need to enter the virtual world of Twitter first. However, I do not claim that the above examples are evidence that the issues relating to the intellectual identity in the physical environment are solved through Twitter entirely, as if it were a panacea of sorts. Indeed, we will avoid the pitfalls of exaggeration. Pragmatically, one cannot deny the existence of real life social and political limits, which create barriers to the previously analysed healthy new perspective and will need to be dealt with outside the realm of Twitter. What Twitter does best, is to change Saudi

[22] Hanan works in a private sector, where mixed-gender environment in work is possible in Saudi Arabia.

women's perceptions and opinions on certain, deep-rooted ideas and concepts, and as a result to instil in them the drive to fight for a different perspective in Saudi society.

However, I strongly argue that the above examples highlight the importance of the platform as an essential tool to enhance Saudi women's intellectual identity, and to create a new brand of projected identity among Saudi women. Moreover, the analysis also shows clear and direct examples demonstrating the dramatic shift in perceptions of how female users define themselves as Saudi women. The following statements are illustrative quotations showing the contrast between participants' old definition and the new definition of identity, before and after using Twitter:

Participant's old definition of a woman and the female identity, before using Twitter:

> "marginalized from the public sphere"
>
> "A diamond that should be hidden"
>
> "A person who should be protected inside her house"
>
> "When I started being recognized by journalists, I couldn't make any interviews because my family believed it was shameful to write my name in the news as a matter of publicity"

Participant's new definition of a woman and the female identity, after using Twitter:

> "I'm a recognized individual"
>
> "I'm proud of what I have built in my professional life"
>
> "I'm a proud journalist"
>
> "Life makes more sense now that I've become a social activist"

The new definition that the interviewees proposed showed a stronger image of the Saudi woman as an independent individual. While in the physical environment the participants presented the old definition, based on marginalization and invisibility as discussed in previous chapters, many participants here expressed a sense of identity built actively in the virtual yet still public sphere. To change the perception of an individual and society is the most challenging step towards social and gender reforms. Such a strong shift was almost impossible to achieve under the current constraints in the physical world of Saudi Arabia. Yet this new potential, offered by Twitter, for women to explore a new definition of the female identity, has also influenced women's behaviours and attitudes in the physical world. The shift has moved beyond the personal level onto a social level. The appearance of Twitter has functioned as a tool for resistance against the unhealthy definition of female individuality that prevailed in Saudi Arabia, reaching from school education to public policy. With reference to Castells' theory of identity construction described in previous chapters, we can view the participants here in the three categories of identity:

1. The projected identity, represented by the majority (19 participants)
2. The resistance identity, represented by 4 participants.
3. The Legitimizing identity, represented by 2 participants.

The appearance of the projected identity, a strong virtual identity for the Saudi woman and her strong influence in this virtual platform, has not only created a new perception among women vis-a-vis themselves, but also among men towards women. This is explored further in the next theme through the analysis of the ways in which

perceptions are reformed by Twitter's broadening of access to information and easing of communications.

9.3 Reforming Perceptions

Twitter has modified perceptions. I explore the extent to which this occurred before discussing what, in Twitter, allowed this. The second theme in this chapter is therefore built around the following:

- The nature of communication in Twitter and its impact on previous religious and social perceptions in relation to gender
- The access to information and its impact on women's behaviour towards socio-religious perceptions

Just as I explored them in the context of Saudi schools and forming perceptions in a traditional setting in the absence of new social media, this section looks at the effect of the latter, notably Twitter, on individuals who were once subjected to the traditional ways of Saudi education. This is carried out in order to compare and contrast Saudi women's perceptions with and without Twitter, and so highlight the specificities brought about by the social media platform.

The nature of social media and more specifically Twitter's impact on individuals is difficult to quantify. As discussed in the literature review, research papers on social media, i.e., Twitter, offering a specific brand of communications and ease of access to information, have identified negative impacts on the individual. Indeed, it is often the case that the interactions between a virtual world and reality result in a wealth of

negative outcomes for individual development and includes isolation, social phobia, etc., as stated in the introduction. In some extreme cases, it may be a cause for mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia. However, as discussed in the literature review, several recent studies in western academia have predicted, to the contrary, virtual reality to be a positive cognitive factor on the individual. In fact, a study on interpersonal communication on the Internet, telephone, and face-to-face communication concluded that online interaction was perceived as high quality (Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004).

Interestingly, unlike in the western world, this research has indicated many positive impacts of virtual reality on gender identity and religious awareness in Saudi society, as well as on an interactive level. This complex situation points to the probable existence of a variety of reasons and contextual causes that affect the ways in which social media can be beneficial or detrimental to individuals. Due to the high degree of secularization of western states, for instance, as opposed to Saudi Arabia, and other such related factors, there are many positive, observable, impacts of social media that are difficult to find in the western world while being prevalent elsewhere. Chief among them could be cited issues regarding online interactions and perfection-formation, within a more equal context than the one provided by the physical world. One of these impacts is the reforming of socio-religious perceptions, which is key to this thesis, as I will now explore.

9.3.1 Socio-religious Perceptions

All the participants in this study encountered some system of reform in their socio-religious perceptions as they joined the world of Twitter. While manifestations of

reform in socio-religious perceptions were by no means identical for every participant, all of them referred in various ways to feelings of change regarding their beliefs, and of a transition from old to new perceptions. All twenty-five women shared the two perceptions discussed in this theme. Furthermore, they expressed a change of attitude as an outcome for their changed perceptions.

The first part of this theme focuses on socio-religious perceptions that are built around the concept of sex segregation. Part 1 is particularly concerned with participants' understanding and perceptions of sex segregation through two main religious concepts, highlighted in the data analysis:

- The perception of marriage and *alshofa alshareya* – meeting the future wife for the first time by family arrangement
- The perception of *Ekhtelat*: mixing of sexes and gender segregation. Most of the responses highlighted the dramatic impact of Twitter on these two perceptions.

This impact appeared mainly by filling the intellectual gap between men and women. Building an intellectual bridge through Twitter has counter-balanced a missing link that never existed between the two genders in the physical world.

Analysing the nature of reform seen by above perceptions leads us to consider the shifting of attitudes in regards to such perceptions. Interview data illustrates the transforming attitudes of the respondents towards *Fatwas* that are related to women in general, and sex segregation specifically. In the upcoming sub section, I attempt to

communicate the various reformed perceptions that were exemplified among the participating women, explaining how these perceptions are manifested in their changed attitudes towards "Saudi" *Fatwa.*

9.3.2 Reforming the Perception of *Shofa-shariya*

The perception of 'Shofa-shariya' is used in the data analysis as an example speaking volumes to the reformation of perceptions in Saudi Arabia. Since the family is the nucleus of Islamic society, and marriage is the only way to bring families into existence, the Prophet (PBUH) encouraged his followers to marry as soon as they get the chance. The Shari'ah prescribes rules to regulate the functioning of the family so that both spouses can live together in love, security, and tranquillity. "Marriage in Islam has aspects of both 'Ibadah' – worship – of Allah and 'mu'amalah' – transactions between human beings" (Singh, 2011, p.58). The concept of marriage in the Islamic school curriculum is presented in an unbalanced way by its 'Ibadah' aspects, marginalizing the beautiful traditions of the prophet and the complete interpretations of the concept of Shofa-shariya. Moreover, it introduces the concept of Shofa-shariya through the following definition: when a man proposes, he is allowed to see the woman once before marriage. In other words, the focus is placed on choosing a wife based on her looks and her body, without considering other aspects of human connections on a deeper level, such as intellectual connections.

The emergence of intellectual connections between the two genders in Twitter was the main change observed regarding the idea of marriage and the new perspectives on it. Over half of the participants indicated that Twitter had improved the perception of marriage among young Saudis. The following quotations are representative of the

majority of participants in this study, who changed their way of choosing a partner after using Twitter. They describe this reformation of the concept of marriage as follows:

> "My personal preferences in terms of a significant other used to be about how he looks and how he talks. Now it's about how he thinks as well."
>
> – Salma

> "I want a partner who shares with me some interests in life so we can have something in common. I want our relationship to be based on friendship... If you had asked me the same question when I was 17, I would have told you that I want someone who looks like Justin Bieber."
>
> – Ruba

> "Only 10 years ago, if you asked your brother or son, 'what are you looking for in your future wife?' he would give you his preferences in terms of physical look, for example "tall, tanned, brown hair and big eyes." But nowadays and thanks to the social media, you would easily get different answers, such as "educated, interested in charity work, she has a vision in life, she loves travelling" and so on."
>
> – Fajr

"Most of my friends got married lately to people they met through social media. Their first interaction with their spouses was an intellectual one. I believe that the priority of the intellectual connection has been increased in choosing a life partner."

– Fajr

"All my parents have in common is a conversation about the food being cooked at home, or about me and my sisters. I have never witnessed an interesting intellectual connection between them, and I used to think this is how marriage is supposed to be."

– Alya

The above quotations provide strong evidence that reforming socio-religious perceptions in a conservative culture would never have happened smoothly and organically without the intellectual interaction between men and women as witnessed on social media platforms. The creation of a mixed environment has always been challenging in the physical world, especially in Saudi Arabia. For instance, with regard to elementary education, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Shaikh Abdul-Aziz Al-Alshaikh[23] (1993-1999) addressed the danger of a mixed gender environment in elementary schools. He argued in one of his television interviews that the mixing between genders, even in elementary schools, lead to chaos and adultery (The ruling of mixed-gendered schools / Shaikh Abdul-Aziz Al-Alshaikh, 2011). Looking at such *Fatwa* gives great insight on how difficult it is to resist traditional dogmas and ideologies and bring about change within a society as a whole. Even though the

[23] Shaikh Abdul-Aziz Al-Alshaikh: Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia (1993-1999) who comes from the same family of Muhammad Bin Abdul-Wahhab Al-Alshaikh. Indeed, he follows the same Ideology.

concept of marriage is still under development in the physical world, it is impossible to deny the dramatic shift in mind-sets triggered by Twitter in allowing for a mixed space and intellectual exchanges.

My argument is not limited to the *Shofa-shareya*. Indeed, many other phenomena support my point, which is that Twitter is helping young Saudis change their perceptions and rationales on a broad number of concepts. The perception of '*Ekhtelat*'[24] is another highly pertinent illustration in this matter as will now be developed.

9.3.3 Reforming the Perception of 'Ekhtelat'

Ekhtelat, in my view, is not a religious concept. In fact, none of the Islamic sources (Qur'an and Sunna) mention the word 'Ekhtelat'. This view is controversial and could well be challenged by many scholars and individuals who believe to the contrary that *Ekhtelat* is a religious concept. Regardless of personal opinions, however, it is clear that the comprehension of *Ekhtelat* as a religious or secularly invented concept is deeply linked to the access to social media. Sixteen of the twenty-five participants agreed that they used to define *Ekhtelat* as a religious concept. However, their definition of *Ekhtelat* has changed into a concept that is not religious, but rather social or political, after using Twitter. In the following sub section, I will present the analysis that illustrates this point and explain the reformation process that occurs in women's belief systems as they encounter Twitter. To explore the emergence of the

[24] Ekhtelat: The intermingling of the sexes. The meeting together, and mixing of men and women in one place.

new understanding among participants, the reform of *Ekhtelat* is presented in two phases.

- **The First Phase of Reform**

In their reflections, the participants seemed to have made more sense of the concept in and of itself. Their reactions suggest that they had finally found some answers to conscious and subconscious questions that developed throughout their educational experience, but somehow remain unanswered. With reference to previous chapters, this seems to be one instance of confusion and a rejection of a contradictorily implemented concept. The use of Twitter, however, has helped the respondents to think and reflect on a traditional concept, and therefore to build their own understanding of it. The users' experience influenced their perceptions in four stages: re-questioning, re-valuing, re-thinking, and abandoning.

- **Re-questioning** the meaning of the concept Ekhtelat: by comparing the access to information in Twitter and in the educational system, as discussed in the previous chapters, a higher level of freedom in the access to information in the former is immediately noticeable. This freedom exposed different opinions, specifically *Fatwas* with regard to *Ekhtelat*. These opinions are from some scholars from Saudi Arabia and other different Muslim countries such as Kuwait, Egypt, and Lebanon. A great number of *Fatwas* from outside Saudi disagrees with the prohibition of *Ekhtelat*. Hence, the global interaction of various opinions on Twitter on one issue, opened the gate to re-questioning previous perceptions, such as *Ekhtelat*.

- **Re-valuing** the concept: questioning the concept by the exposure of other *Fatwas* participated in undressing the concept of its religious value, a value created in school. The new meaning discredited the idea among participants that avoiding *Ekhtelat* was part of their religious obligations. Listening to the participants' discourse on their perceptions of *Ekhtelat* before and after entering the world of Twitter, I became more aware of the dramatic influence that Twitter could have in reforming such complex concepts. Abeer, the mathematics student whose answers showed her mathematical analysis of any topic discussed in the interview, commented:

> "I remember looking at a hashtag on *Ekhtelat* after the popular YouTube video appeared, showing mixed students dancing in the new Saudi KAUST University. Most of the hashtags were addressing three different groups of opinions: Group 1. Questioning the definition of *Ekhtelat*. Group 2. Addressing the association of *Ekhtelat* with sexual interests. Group 3. That *Ekhtelat* is not a top priority to discuss compared to unemployment and corrupted education, etc. All of these opinions were re-questioning the concept of *Ekhtelat* and its existence in Islamic text, and I did so, too."

Hanan also expressed similar response to the concept of *Ekhtelat*:

> "I believe that the most discussed topic I remember following its details was on *Ekhtelat*. Religious scholars' opinions vary in many

ways. Now I'm convinced that *Ekhtelat* was a wide extrapolation by some scholars, and not religion."

In the preceding comments, the participants were two examples of people who expressed with great confidence that they do not see *Ekhtelat* from a religious perspective. This level of confidence would never exist without their exposure to a different nature of information and communication. For such a level of confidence, and of depth in intellectual discussions from both men and women to happen in a country like Saudi Arabia, a mixture of two elements was necessary: access to information and high connectivity. Twitter has become the most adequate environment for this transitional change in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the last stage of this process of reformation of traditional concept could not have been achieved in the physical world of Saudi society.

- **Re-thinking** the concept: undressing the concept from its religious value allowed a critical space to voice the dissonance that the concept holds. This dissonance was highlighted in the research that was conducted in the school, as it is also highlighted in social media. One respondent, Wed, stated:

  "It's funny when you hear about *Fatwas* forbidding *Ekhtelat* in places like supermarkets' selling points. I remember seeing a caricature circulating in the social media about that exact point. The caricature [see below] shows that having a female seller and a male costumer is considered *Ekhtelat* by religious scholars but having a

It is worth mentioning here that the analysis does not deal with the issue of caricatures in relation to criticizing the religion of Islam as a whole, neither does it consider criticism of its holy figures, such as the prophet (PBUH). This is an entirely different case. The caricatures were made by Muslims and people familiar with the Islamic religion. These artists work with a high sense of respect to what is acceptable in Islam. The focus here is the critical statement made about certain socio-religious perceptions within Saudi society. More specifically, these perceptions developed throughout the Saudi education experience. More caricatures were presented by the participants criticizing these perceptions, such as the patriarchal aspect of society, female abuse, the prominent role of male guardians, the dress code, and so on.

The dress code also serves as a highlight to any argument made in relation to the Saudi identity. Thus, the data collected on critical expressions to socio-religious concepts could not exclude it either. The following is another similar example suggested by Salma. This example shows a realistic caricature criticizing the use of the V&A dress code outside Saudi Arabia:

Figure 20 Translation: Saudi couple in their Honeymoon, in Malaysia

I have noticed, throughout interviews, dark comedy in general and caricatures specifically were allowed wider freedom than any other form of critical expression. The analysis proposes that caricatures are a great and effective tool to criticize a sensitive subject in Saudi society. Caricatures act as indirect, more diplomatic tool to ease into serious arguments and discussions between conservative Saudi scholars and liberal individuals. Therefore, caricatures help avoid any serious conflicts in a collectivist society that has never learned the protocol of the individualistic environment, such as the one observed in the social media platforms. This brings us to the last stage of the reformation of personal conceptions, which is the stage of abandoning:

- **Abandoning**: to change an attitude, one needs to change the belief, or rationale, behind this attitude. For many participants, it was not possible to abandon a practice that they believed followed a socio-religious rationale. Questioning this perception, transforming its value, and criticizing its dissonance among the participants created a new attitude towards these perceptions. The most common attitude in the collected data was abandoning. Most participants encountered a form of abandoning with regard to the practices resulting from previous perceptions, in both the virtual and the physical environment. This point is further expanded in section 9.3.5 on the transforming behaviours toward *fatwa*.

But before continuing, let us have an overview of the proposed four stages of reform to gain an inclusive picture of the situation.

The preceding observations outline stages that emerged from a close analysis of the collected data. However, I am aware that they may seem to be an over-simplification of complex issues. In fact, I recognize four possible different positions as counter-arguments to my stance. Therefore, I would like to address them in the following paragraphs, in order to strengthen my argument.

- Let us consider the first position.

If freedom to access information is the motivation behind each and everyone's use of Twitter and constantly leads to the re-questioning of a concept, this means that the Internet in general, with its higher level of freedom and connectivity, could also have achieved it. Thus, the dramatic influence of reforming perceptions is not exclusive to Twitter. For instance, typing in Google to search for an online document, or downloading an online book could be enough to encourage such reforms.

In general, I would possibly agree with the above motion. However, I find it necessary to stress that this research was conducted in Saudi society. Considering the cultural setting of this research, Saudi society and the Arab world in general suffer from a lack of a broad and customary habit of reading. Perhaps one of the reasons behind this lack is that they people do not have a positive relationship with books from the way books were introduced in schools. The Arab Thought Foundation's 'Fikr' released its fourth annual cultural development report that found that an Arab individual, on average, reads a quarter of a page a year, compared to the eleven books read by the average American and the seven books by the average British person. (Fourth Arab Report for Development, trans 2010) Hence, passive information on Google, for instance, is not attractive to Saudi individuals. On the contrary, Twitter

provides interactive information within a social frame. Unlike Google, Twitter provides a theoretical and practical approach and understanding of these perceptions. For instance, in this research, specifically regarding the concept of *Ekhtelat*, the users not only understood a new meaning of it, but also experienced this new definition through an interactive dialogue with other Twitter users. Both the interactivity and sociability that are absent in the physical world, but present on Twitter, act as motives to influence and stimulate the Saudi mind – on Twitter more than on other relatively more passive platforms.

- Let us consider the second position.

The concept of Ekhtelat was already re-valued before the use of Twitter. In the previous section of research, students stated that some socio-religious perceptions such as Ekhtelat or the V&A dress code were already seen and practiced from a pure social value or a national value rather than a religious one.

It is undeniable that the religious value of *Ekhtelat* was already questioned by individuals before the use of Twitter. However, the analysis of this chapter shows a much greater awareness among female users, especially compared to the respondents from the previous chapters in the context of the schools. In other words, women with such awareness were considered a minority in Chapter 6 and 7, while in this chapter they turned into a majority – I argue – because of their Twitter experience. This also indicates reform on a social level rather than merely an individual one.

- The third position is as follows:

Criticizing Ekhtelat, especially through black comedy, has always existed in traditional media

It is true that the critical space was allowed in traditional media, such as the famous local television program "Tash Ma tash"[25], or in newspapers through occasional caricatures. However, as mentioned previously, the interactive nature of Twitter increased the level of impact of this medium. Most importantly, the intensity and volume of the consistently critical materials on Twitter are certainly much higher and wider than in traditional media.

- Lastly, let us conclude by analysing the forth position.

Abandoning the prohibition of Ekhtelat in the physical world as a result of reformed perceptions through Twitter is neither a practical, nor a realistic outcome for one main reason. The public policy of the country does not support the Ekhtelat in the physical environment. Furthermore, the public policy of the country supports the religious police, i.e. Mutawa, who claim that they are moral guardians of the public. The police use extreme punishment if they witness a case of Ekhtelat, such as a man and a woman who are not related having coffee in a public place. Thus, technically, the act of abandoning is against the law, and it has dangerous consequences.

I strongly agree that abandoning the prohibition is not realistic in the physical world at this stage. However, abandoning the prohibition *virtually* is a crucial step towards

[25] Tash Ma tash: A comedy TV show presenting negative phenomena in Saudi society. The show challenged many socio-religious perceptions and criticised the religious authorities through comedy. (Raphaeli, 2005)

reform in the real world. Narrowing the gap between both genders in Twitter has participated in creating a form of abandoning among users through the rise of the new concept, "virtual *Ekhtelat*". This leads us unto the second half of my analysis of *Ekhtelat* and the virtual space: the second phase of reform.

- **The Second Phase of Reform**

My analysis of the interview data suggests that the nature of communication among Twitter users promotes a new virtual concept, which I have chosen to label virtual *Ekhtelat*. I define it as the mixing between the two genders through tweeting, re-tweeting, commenting on tweets, and private messages. This new concept is instrumental in the re-questioning of the negativity traditionally associated with *Ekhtelat*, a negativity introduced through the school curriculum. Thus, the previous understanding of *Ekhtelat* was consequently redefined. Answers showed positive results of the practice of "virtual *Ekhtelat*", which was ignited by the interaction between men and women voicing their opinions in debates on current events on Twitter. For instance, building an intellectual bridge in Twitter between Saudi men and women freed them from limiting their relationship to sexual interest only. Moreover, it has weakened the suspicious intentions at the heart of women's feeling of shame and fear, as argued in Chapter 6. Lama and Nora, for example, show the benefits of intellectual interactions between the two genders in the following passages.

> "I have so many followers, but I <u>interact</u> with few, and some of them are <u>Saudi men</u> that I have never met. We always exchange

> opinions, re-tweet each other's tweets, and enjoy positive intellectual debates on society, religion, science, emotions, everything! It's an amazing new experience."
>
> - Lama

> "Since I started using Twitter specifically, I considered it as a valuable new experience in my life. I discovered a whole new world of ideas and beliefs. The best of them is the interaction and debate on these thoughts with the opposite sex, which we, as Saudi women, lack in real life"
>
> - Nora

The overall sense I got from most of the participants' responses in relation to the reformation of *Ekhtelat* on Twitter was positive. Even those who did not need Twitter to develop a new understanding of the concept described their enthusiasm at lending the concept new values and a new understanding after starting to use Twitter. Ghada, for instance, who comes from a different lifestyle and who is more exposed to mixed environments than Sultana, Hanan, Abeer, Lama, Nora and Hamsa, did not need Twitter to reform her understanding of the concept of *Ekhtelat*. However, she still emphasized the importance of Twitter in relation to *Ekhtelat*. She stated:

> "I've been interacting with Saudi men from different backgrounds inside Saudi in private events. Since I grew up outside Saudi in boarding schools, I always believed that this so-called concept was an extreme interpretation of the Islamic text. Yet I do find "virtual

Ekhtelat" very useful as I don't get the chance to interact enough with many men in my society apart from family and family friends".

From the discourse excerpts examined, the observation derived is that free access to information is not enough for the reforming of perceptions to be achieved on their own, especially without an accompanying high level of communication. The exact extent and ways in which Twitter may have positively influenced our subject matter in this regard are difficult to appreciate. It could be argued to the contrary of the previous assumption that a high level of communication could just as effectively fuel an increase in the influence of conservative scholars by providing them another platform to utilise in their attempts to impact Saudi women's daily lives. Thus, Twitter users adhering to the religious curriculum's ideology would be offered a wider and freer platform to express their views in much the same way others, by definition the majority, simply drown out dissenting opinions given the user-generated characteristic of the content on Twitter. This complicated appreciation of the impact of Twitter on the improved communication of a wider range of religious views and interpretations is discussed in the following section.

9.3.5 Transforming behaviours toward *Fatwas.*

Free access to information allowed for the creation of an environment where Saudi women's identities could be shaped by a broader range of religious ideologies and perspectives. Indeed, perhaps the most salient form of change within socio-religious perceptions is the one observed in the participants' shifting views regarding areas of behaviours related to the notion of *Fatwas*. As explained earlier, *Fatwas* are the products of the Council of Senior Scholars, the highest religious body in Saudi Arabia. They can be defined as learned interpretations or rulings on a point of Islamic

law given by a recognized authority such as a *Mufti*. The *Fatwas* provided by the Council of Senior Scholars are based on Wahhabi teachings and rationale, which themselves originate with a leading proponent of this ideology, Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, a former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Baz was known for his harsh and aggressive *Fatwas* towards women – or what some simply described as "inflexible attitudes towards women" (AbuKhalil, 2004).

When examining the physical environment, one soon realises that the school curriculum promotes its own moral definitions, especially on issues relating to women. The school's definitions went hand-in-hand with the message of the *Fatwas*. These *fatwas* include subjects such as inheritance and marriage contracts, as well as physical purity and attire. After 1979, Saudi Ulama produced more than 30,000 *Fatwas* on women (Abdullah, 2005; Al-Rasheed, 2013). The sheer number of these *fatwas* reflects fetishism amounting to an obsession with all matters regarding women, as they promote the marginalisation of women in society. More importantly, these *Fatwas* are the foundation of the religious curriculum in schools and universities. This ensures that children and the youth of the nation are socialized and educated into accepting these opinions from an early age (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

With regard to the virtual world, *Fatwas* became a matter of any Twitter user's opinion with any background in Islamic studies. Thus, as much as the new freedom of information in the above analysis was positive space for *Fatwas* from outside Saudi to enter the Saudi society and participate in reforming perceptions, it can be negative in providing a space for the dissemination of an extremely conservative body of *Fatwas* by some Wahhabi scholars. Therefore, as much as Twitter triggers reformed views

and discussion, it can also become a supporting platform to resist the positive reform in socio-religious perceptions.

It should be noted, however, that some participants expressed a sufficient awareness of this potentiality to consciously resist and reject such voices on the virtual platform.

Hanan showed this awareness in the following statement:

> "I once read a tweet by some Saudi religious scholar forbidding *Ekhtelat* on Twitter. People's comments were funny, and one tweet suggested, in a sarcastic way, that female users should only follow female users, and male user should only follow male users, because we have *Fatwa* forbidding *Ekhtelat* on Twitter".
>
> - Hanan

The women interviewed developed a critical skill through their use of Twitter whereby they debated what was acceptable to believe and what was not. They learned to decide what to read, and who to follow and speak to for themselves. The following quotations illustrate how the majority of the participants showed a high level of awareness, regardless of the negative scholars' voices on the platform.

> "I became more aware of my <u>rights as a human</u> through the tweets of religious scholars from Egypt, Kuwait, and Emirates for example."

"Now I know that *Fatwa's* coming from Saudi scholars are not the conclusions of my rational thinking. It is my right to be able to doubt, to ask and to search for information elsewhere, where my conscience leads me to the right judgment"

"Honestly, I wasn't interested in the driving campaign led by Manal Alsharif as driving is not my number one priority personally. Yet, it did not hit me how Twitter can provide a platform to educate women about their rights in general until this campaign happened."

"I use Twitter for updated news about current events and to search for information about scholars' opinion on a current specific issue described in the newspapers or in TV shows. The latest one I searched for was about an English husband and a Saudi wife who were attacked by the religious moral police"

"... There are many *fatwas* from Saudi scholars who need to be questioned and I started to re-consider some of the beliefs I've been taught in schools after entering the Twitter community".

Moreover, the responses of Hanan and others show that the free access to information on *Fatwas* exposed many of doubtful aspects of these Saudi *Fatwas* in relation to women's rights. As noted earlier, these opinions were strongly challenged with the rise of the social media, through the exposure of other opinions from different Islamic

countries. Alya, for instance, clarified how her exposure to other *Fatwas* altered her behaviour within the context of her professional life as a Muslim. She explains:

> "I completely changed my understanding of going to work and getting permission from my male guardian before I sign a contract in a mixed work environment after I read a Tweet by a famous Kuwaiti religious scholar, Dr. Alsuwaidan. The tweet was regarding Women *Fatwas* in work. He said, "They tell me the prohibition of women going out to work was to protect the women from being seduced by men. I tell them, coming from their logic, a prohibition of men going out to work should happen to protect the men from being seduced by women." As a result, we would no longer have a working society. Eventually, society would be destroyed. Thus, I believe that we've been misled in the Islamic curriculum and its representation of women's role in society."
>
> - Alya

As a result of exposure to different sources of information, *Fatwas* are questioned and re-examined among female Twitter users in a different, more unbiased space that allows them to come to their own conclusions. Determinant information usually presents itself in the form of other challenging *Fatwas* originating from other Islamic countries. None of them are from other Saudi scholars. The latter have been highly criticized among Twitter users. In addition, some scholars have faced public humiliation because of *Fatwas* related to women. Regarding these, most participants expressed repeatedly feeling that those *Fatwas* were "nonsense". For instance, the

caricature mentioned above was described by many with words, such as "funny", "weird", "ridiculous", "humiliating", "racist", and "ignorant". Two additional examples of a YouTube link posted on Twitter presented how *Fatwas* turned from a serious respected form of religious practice and rules, into joke-like creations provided by ignorant scholars and open to ridicule.

These two examples provided by the participants, formulate the analysis of this section with a black comedy flavour. The first YouTube example is for a TV Program presenting 10 famous *fatwas* under the title: "The weirdest 10 *Fatwas* in the 2nd millennium" (Aldosari,2014). Each of these *Fatwas* has been highly criticized in the media in general, but later put more freely on Twitter. Even the television program that presented them chose these *Fatwas* and numbered them based on Twitter user opinions. The 10 *fatwas* are presented according to their increasing level of "weirdness"; below are the top five:

> 5. "The killing of Mickey Mouse in peace and war times is allowed because it is a mouse and mice are dirty."
> - Preacher Muhammad Almunjed.

> 4. "The killing of owners of Satellite Channels is allowed, because they lead to "Fetna: temptations" and the spread of obscenity. If this practice is not stopped and punished by the authority, then killing them is allowed." - Shaikh Saleh Allehaidan

3. "Open food buffets at restaurants are not allowed because the amount of food you are eating is not measured based on the money you're paying, and this leads to cheating and manipulation." - Shaikh Saleh Alfozan

2. "Women are allowed to breastfeed a mature man in order to become like a son to her instead of a stranger under two conditions: first, if this stranger needs to spend time inside the house of that woman for work purposes or because they only have each other as support in life. Second, he has to take the milk in an appropriate way and not directly from her breast." - Shaikh Abdulmohsin Alobaikan

1. "The killing of people who allow *Ekhtelat* in education and work environment is allowed. Moreover, anyone who allows *Ekhtelat* is not considered Muslim anymore and our duty as Muslims is to kill that person, because *Ekhtelat* is forbidden." - Shaikh Abdurrahman Albarrak

(Aldosari,2014).

The second YouTube example highlighted in the interview data circulated through a hashtag: (Twitter, 2013) based on a video of Saleh Alluhaidan. Alluhaidan (YouTube, 2013), who is believed by some people to be a scholar, announced a *Fatwa* prohibiting women to drive cars for a dissonance reason. This link was discussed in a hashtag based on his statement. He explained his reason in this YouTube video, claiming that driving is harmful to women because the ovaries would be damaged

when women drive, which would result in sterility. He defended his argument against a Saudi gynaecology consultant, further claiming that this statement was based on scientific studies in spite of his failure to deliver any evidence.

The preceding two examples led to intense public humiliation for the Saudi scholars involved. In fact, some Saudi intellectuals in the virtual world of Twitter created a weaker image for the value and credibility of *Fatwas*. The critical interactive exposure of these "weird *Fatwas*" as they have been defined by society (reflected in the program host's language in the first example), changed the behaviours Twitter users significantly. Specifically, female users started to look for other *fatwas* away from Saudi scholars. Their behaviours shifted radically, from believing in the absolute correctness of all Saudi *Fatwas* into searching for fairness in other *Fatwas*. The *Fatwas* searched for are "free *Fatwas*", as participants described them: they are free from ignorance and gender discrimination.

The women who provide the above examples drew attention to an important decision made by King Abdullah in 2010. King Abdullah had previously decreed that only members of the Council of Ulama and few other clerics would be allowed to issue *Fatwas* in Saudi Arabia. However, this *Fatwa* acted against previous political authority. More specifically, it acted against King Abdullah's decisions in relation to gender reform, such as the opening of the KAUST University and allowing *Ekhtelat* in higher education (see 2.4.3). Thus, the king decided in 2010 to limit *Fatwas* to the Council of Senior Scholars.

It is worth mentioning that this *Fatwa* displays the central presence in the public consciousness of religious and societal debates found on Twitter. Based on participant views, this *Fatwa* gives a perfect example for the most discussed perception-debate on Twitter, which is *Ekhtelat*. Now interestingly, *Ekhtelat* was also crucial in displaying tensions between political authorities and religious authorities in the country. However, the king's decision in limiting these *Fatwas* shows exactly who has the upper hand between both authorities. The possibility of such conflictual relations triggers the question of what effect such situations will lead to with regard to personal identity. The interaction of these authorities in addition to the self and the social authority on Twitter are worth analysing independently in the following theme.

9.4 Contrasting Authorities

Within the sphere of powerful authorities' determinant powers on individual lives and self-authorship, a political authority is highlighted. It is, however, necessary to introduce this theme by reminding ourselves of the literature review chapter. Namely, it is worth highlighting, again, that the Kingdom was founded based on two powers, the political authorities present in the royal family of Al Saud, and the religious authorities, represented by Mohammad Abdul Wahhab followers. When we study the kingdom's history, we could not predict the separation of these two powers in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, from the foundation of the kingdom up until 9/11, as discussed in detail previously, the two authorities built a solid romantic relationship, equal in internal power, and harmonious in their objectives towards the individual.

As a result of this relationship, political authorities control the media and the economic institutions, while the religious authorities control the educational and the

social institutions, neither of which are secular. Moreover, the religious authorities participated in the foundation of the country further through contributions, including the emphasis on guardians' consecration. Therefore, based on this strategy, the identity of the Saudi kingdom was built. This is based on rule by the Islamic and the Shari'a law in addition to the guardianship of the two holy mosques. This dynamic strongly suggests that we cannot predict the separation of these two powers without losing the Islamic identity of the country.

However, such a separation of powers came into consideration after 9/11. This event constitutes a critical break, an event that has influenced the interaction between the two pillars of the Saudi state. After 9/11, the political authority saw the need for a new strategy to rebrand its image. This strategy started an internal, unfriendly relationship between the government and the religious authority. The government was keen to keep such an atmosphere private and indirect, and turn any issue from a political focus to a social one, in order to keep its holy guardianship. However, this private issue was highly exposed when people started to use Twitter.

Based on this phenomenon, as explained in the literature review, political authorities saw the need for a new strategy to rebrand the identity of the kingdom. This strategy's main objective was the separation of the political authority from the religious one without the state or the political leaders losing their Islamic identity. Perhaps this separation was highly studied, as it was neither a purely domestic event, nor a direct one. Indeed, the separation was closely linked to the global image of the kingdom.

The data analysed in this theme illustrates the interaction between these authorities in relation to the platform of Twitter. The incident between King Abdullah and the *Fatwa* number1 (in section 9.3.5), which was discussed previously and witnessed in discussion on Twitter, clearly illustrates the interaction between the political and religious authority. More specifically, it shows how the government limited the religious authority in the social media platform, by the King's decision. Limiting the issuing of *Fatwas* to the Council and a few other clerics has led to the limitation of the expansion of the Saudi religious voices through the social media.

9.4.1 The Political Authority and the Religious Authority

In the Arab world in general, with the rise of social media "regimes seek to stifle non-state narratives, which threaten to establish competing social perspectives and alternative sources of authority" (Davies, 2015). When Twitter started to become popular, the government focused on using the platform as a tool to turn debates in the kingdom from politico-religious arguments into socio-religious ones. Having said that, it does not mean that the government wants internal instability in the kingdom, such as conflicts between Sunna and Shia; nor do they look forward to civil war. However, it is a matter of redirecting and distracting powerful social influences from political conflicts, onto what they consider more superficial issues, such as the right of Saudi women to drive. (Understanding the history of Saudi Arabia within the context of this research, discussed in Chapter 2) the question here is then, what is a better theme in politics to encourage socio-religious discussions between various religious and social players in Twitter? The answer, clearly, is women.

The analysis of the interviews suggests that social media is one of the main elements used by the political authority to support its new branding strategy on gender reform, as opposed to the "religious authority". The shift in power from the religious to the political authority in the real world has been encouraged through Twitter as a challenging tool to weaken the religious authority in reality. I demonstrate this somewhat controversial point in the following few paragraphs.

The participating women in this study agree that Twitter is indeed monitored by the Saudi government. In addition, it is monitored from a specific perspective. When it comes to criticizing socio-religious perceptions within a social or religious context, rather than a political one, the freedom offered by Twitter makes it a highly flexible tool. This agreement is founded on the inharmonious relationship, in the virtual world, between the religious and the political authority on gender reform. The quotations below explain this point:

> "If I want to tweet about how some of the social traditions we practice are not religious and therefore we don't have to follow them, I read the tweet twice before I publish it, just to make sure that I'm not criticizing anything political."

Hamsa, in the above quotation, describes how she views this relationship by explaining the process she goes through, before she decides to tweet something critical about a socio-religious concept. But since the political authority is highly dependent on the religious authority in the real world, and the separation is only a superficial one as noted previously, the freedom women have on Twitter can be vague sometimes. The quotation below perfectly elucidates the nature of this freedom:

> "Twitter is a double-edged sword; you're free to face the religious authority on women's issues, although facing political authority could put you in jail using religious accusations. This is very tricky!"

Similarly, the case of Manal Alshareef was repeatedly addressed by participants in relation to authority in the virtual world. Alshareef is a Saudi woman who led the driving campaign that took place on Twitter. Few of the responses considered her case against the political authority while most of them believed in the presence of hidden agendas, suggesting the existence of governmental support behind her campaign. I argue that Alshareef, who was extensively exposed on Twitter, was supported politically while she was at war with the religious authority who prohibited her actions. To follow are some statements by participants in this study supporting my argument:

> "I believe that "women" and Twitter are tools to weaken the religious authority among Saudi individuals, otherwise Twitter could have been banned easily in Saudi using the religious speech like it's been banned in China for example."
>
> - Jumana

> "Manal was released from jail by the government [political authority] although religious scholars [religious authority] were against the decision of her release".
>
> - Wed

> "There are many tweets from female users, stating strong opinions against driving as the users consider it a forbidden on religious grounds." – Razan

The above statements illustrate the opposing interests in gender reform between the political and the religious authority, especially on the Alshareef case. However, this does not confirm the unlimited support she receives from the government. Alshareef, as I argue, was a tool for a specific issue with a limited power. A personal interview with her conducted by Abdullah Almaghlooth confirms that she was monitored by the government. Furthermore, she was monitored by her boss at her work place, who was possibly directed by the government to ask her to close her Twitter account (Almaghlooth, 2013). Hence, Alshareef did not have the freedom to act against a concept that could possibly be political more than socio-religious. Currently, the Saudi government is using Twitter to shift public opinion from political matters to socio-religious matters. However, the political power's bipolar relationship with the religious one is so that too big a threat to the latter would be harmful to the political power. Hence, you are free and encouraged to discuss and criticize socio-religious issues, as long as you do not condemn the religious authorities altogether. Yet, even though Twitter is monitored because it is considered dangerous politically, I argue that it could support gender reform.

Responses similar to Razan's statement show that indeed, many Saudi individuals seem to trust religious leaders more than they do political leaders, making religion the main authority for them. Consequently, Manal Alsharif was arrested because of

pressure on the government from religious leaders. This indicates that voices that follow the religious authorities and support its anti-feminist approach have a stronger influence in the physical world than in the virtual. However, this strong influence does not go further to influence people's mind in Twitter due to free access to information and the high level of connectivity with people outside the Saudi frame.

Other participants pointed out the weak influence of the anti-feminist, religious speech on Twitter. The social platform is a double-edged sword. The high level of activity of the religious authority deeply exposes their dissonance. Thus, instead of strengthening religious voices, Twitter has weakened them and turned many of them into jokes, mainly through nonsensical *Fatwas*.

The participants considered *Fatwas* the main form of Saudi religious authority on Twitter. Since I already demonstrated, in the previous theme, the transformed behaviour towards the Saudi *Fatwas* among Twitter users, the analysis of users' behaviours towards Saudi *Fatwas* shows the relative weakness of the religious authority on Twitter in comparison to the development of the female individuality.

An example of the desperate resistance of the religious authority against the platform of Twitter was a *fatwa* by the Muttawa whose power is taken seriously by the state and the society. The *fatwa* by Shaikh Abdullateef Alshaikh, the president of the committee engaged with the prohibition of Twitter, stated, "anyone who uses Twitter loses his/her life and his/her afterlife" (BBC, 2013). Some Saudi analysts fear that the platform of Twitter is shared by two contradictory powers, the social and the religious authorities.

Such fear indicates that new powers have to take over in the virtual world of Twitter. The question was not how to suppress these powers, but how to balance them against each other within the limits of political control. Thus, the new level of freedom is divided between the society, the religious leaders, and Saudi individuals – all under the control of political monitoring.

Outside of the select number of political and religious authorities affecting women's lives in Saudi Arabia, a cornucopia of other figures takes on central roles. Consequently, after considering the political and religious authorities that influence female individuality in both environments, I will now move onto another powerful authority that was highlighted in my analysis, which consists of social authorities, and consider the extent and nature of their influence in the matter of the development of female individuality.

9.4.2. The Social Authority and Self-authorship

Chief among the authorities' determinant to women's individuality are guardians and other social authorities whose power in the matter is often just as massive a political authority, if not more. The impact of the influence of such authorities will, as a result, be explored in this chapter. The data in this research was obtained from Saudi women in their twenties who usually live or have lived with their family and are attached to their parents. At some point or another of their education, the respondents have been under male guardianship. According to traditional culture and Islamic law, the male guardian is usually the father, which was mentioned in numerous comments related to authority and participants' behaviour on Twitter. The male guardian, as mentioned

previously, plays an important role in the development of Saudi women. These women were taught at school that a male guardian has absolute authority to control women in all aspects of life, from matters ranging from finance and inheritance, to education, marriage, and travel.

In the physical environment, religious leaders and the state policy overused the concept of the social authority, namely, the male guardianship, in many ways. For instance, women cannot travel without an official permission from the male guardian registered in the passport office system. Without this permission, it is impossible for any women to pass through the passport counter in any Saudi airport. Travelling is only one example of the absolute authority the male guardian has on women's basic rights. One participant's future was shaped by the impact of her male guardian. This participant is one of the exceptions, being granted the freedom by her male guardian to live abroad, whereas in most cases the male guardian is an obstacle and a challenge for a woman to gain her own sense of individuality. This specific respondent stated:

> "Without the support of my father, I would never have achieved my dream to be a successful lawyer, living and working in Dubai with a UK education in Islamic Law."
>
> - Jana

Another participant stated:

> "... Male guardianship is humiliating not only for women, but also offensive for men. To need to be protected from other men in our

> own society means that these men out there are accused with bad morals of crossing limits toward other Muslim women."
>
> - Ameera

An analysis of both statements indicates the great impact of the male guardian on the process of self-authorship among Saudi women in the physical world. With regard to the virtual platform, participants show that the male guardian still had a high level of control over what a woman tweets. However, this authority was divided among the participants between a majority who expressed a positive influence and a minority who showed the negative influence of male guardianship on what a woman can say and see in the virtual world. These influences are explored in the following.

Women are able to shape their own identity when exposing their real names, expressing their own thoughts through their Twitter accounts, and reforming their own behaviours towards women's rights, away from the male guardian's control.

> "My father always tells me his famous advice to me before I leave home to college: Stay away from trouble on Twitter." She added laughingly, "Fortunately, I have the freedom of choice not to stay away from trouble"
>
> "I have the freedom to write whatever I want. My father never expressed his worries towards what I write on Twitter; he's not that active on the platform anyway."

Yet, the control of the male guardian's authority in the social media was traceable in interview answers among female users. A participant who studies Diplomacy in Leeds, United Kingdom, for her BA degree mentioned with a shy voice:

> "I write essays on international relations and diplomacy freely for my college degree, I criticize the marginalized role of Saudi women in the political and diplomatic field, but when it comes to Twitter, where I can still express my thoughts freely, I choose not to do so; for one reason: my father is the biggest follower of my tweets. Whenever I try to write something challenging to any type of authority in Saudi, I get a call from him to remove it immediately. One day I had a huge argument with him regarding freedom of expression, which led me to choose my parent's happiness and satisfaction as my top priority in life."

An analysis of participants' answers indicates a new type of authority, which is unfamiliar in the Saudi society. Yet it appears in the hyperspace of Twitter. The women who participated in the interviews encountered some form of self-authority as they entered the world of Twitter. Self-authority is considered a new concept that developed among female users through their tweeting experience. Although it was noted previously that Twitter is monitored by the government, we cannot ignore that the virtual environment provides some sense of individuality that does not exist in the physical environment. Participants indicated the concept through the following illustrative answers:

"Sometimes I wonder what's my limit in saying what I want to say"

"... Fortunately, I have the freedom of choice not to stay away from trouble"

"I enjoy deciding what I can tweet, I set my own boundaries"

"I try to be respectful when I tweet my opinions, especially on religion"

As noted previously, based on Magolda's theory, it was found in the educational system that there was a lack of self-authorship development within Saudi students, who were stuck in phase one, which amounted to being subjected to external factors. Thus, most Saudi women enter the virtual world of Twitter with an undeveloped idea and ability for self-authorship. Therefore, they start exploring phase two in the Magolda's theory through Twitter, as it was expressed in the above quotation – they start experimenting and gaining practical experience with their intellectual capacities. Indeed, this second phase encourages the individual to let go of the external authority and to replace it with one's internal voice. Participants were found to experience this phase by challenging the external authorities in order to move to phase three: becoming the authors of their own lives.

Indeed, we cannot ignore that some students in the education research expressed a form of maturity and a high level of self-authorship, due to factors exterior to the school realm such as parental influence and education or personal readings. However, as shown previously, females with developed self-authorship were the minority. Hence, the majority entered the world of Twitter with an undeveloped self-authorship,

and were seen to develop their meaningful discoveries in this matter because of it, as analysed throughout this chapter.

9.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to address the ways in which the unique nature of environment, communication, information, and authorities that characterise Twitter as a virtual setting influence Saudi women educated in Saudi schools. More specifically, I explore the ways in which the nature of information on Twitter influence Saudi women's behaviour. Additionally, they led to the reinvention of Saudi women's individuality in answer to my three secondary questions expressed in Chapter 1. This was achieved by presenting a descriptive and interpretive account of the themes most frequently talked about by Saudi women. This interpretive facet aims at providing a close reading of Saudi women's experiences and the examples they provided during the interviews.

What clearly emerges from the data presented above is that the Saudi woman's virtual experience described here is multidimensional and complex. The chapter argues that redefining identity and reforming perceptions were two themes that explain the ways in which these females redefined their physical and intellectual identity and reformed previous perceptions in the virtual world. In summary, analysis indicates that Saudi women start to experiment with a new way of representing themselves in opposition to their usual "invisibility" within physical society by utilizing Twitter accounts under their real names; by tweeting and thus voicing their own personal opinions; by questioning the dissonances in socio-religious perceptions; and by transforming their attitudes and behaviours towards authorities. Participants also attempt to orchestrate

their Twitter experience around the theme of authorities, which is the theme most strongly and directly tied to reality.

There is a common thread within these findings: the contrast between two different environments in which the individual lives. This contrast is revealed by the profoundly dissimilar findings between the research conducted in schools and the research conducted on the virtual platform. The contrast was also manifested in the respondents' new understandings of their identity, perceptions, and authorities because of a shift in the nature of their environment, between the real and the virtual world. The new understandings the women gained from their experience on the virtual platform clashed with measures taken by authorities in the physical world. Regardless of the constraints that these new understandings would find in the real world of Saudi Arabia, I conclude that this chapter shows that the virtual world of Twitter provides a healthier environment for the development of female individuality and will prove beneficial to Saudi Arabia's society, more so than the school-based education of perception and formation of identity alone.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

10.1 Theoretical and Empirical Achievements

This research analysed Saudi female individuality in two different environments: the physical space in socio-religious rather than mere geographical terms, and the virtual space of Twitter. In my first chapter presenting the aim and objectives of this research, the study aimed at providing descriptive and interpretive account of answering the main research question: Are traditional definitions of Saudi female individuality influenced by the rise of new social media, such as Twitter? My argument, developed throughout this thesis, is that Twitter has indeed transformed Saudi female users' sense of individuality.

The use of the idea of individuality is closely concerned with human development in two different environments. The educational setting was detailed before the analysis of the effect of Twitter, since access to new social media for Saudi women only really begins, on average, when they enter adult life. As such, they are far more exposed and likely to internalise the messages taught in the educational environment, and to use these as their perceptive anchors, their reference points against which to judge newly acquired knowledge. In other words, new inputs of information and new ways of communication, as introduced by Twitter, are usually measured against the teachings that Saudi women received in school. In conducting a research bridging two environments, I highlighted the characteristics of both regarding female individuality in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I offer a new framework for investigating the cultural impact of new social media, especially in Arab countries, where the exponential rise in popularity of new social media, as I argued in Chapter 2, often leads to short-term

actions to revert extremist situations. These are born of the mobilising power of social media, rather than long-term decisions made from an informed standpoint in order to protect the population from certain negative impacts of new social media, especially in the socio-political atmosphere of the Middle East and Saudi Arabia in particular.

In Chapter 6, I sought to define female identity in Saudi Arabia by examining the social norms of decorum laid out in the Saudi curriculum as a set of constraints presented as pseudo-religious obligations. The anti-feminist stance taken by the curriculum contradicts the original Islamic texts, as I argued in Chapter 2. However, it is under a religious pretence that the Saudi state promulgates ideas, such as the essential disappearance of women from the public sphere by adopting a highly limiting dress code, and the intellectual under-development of women, making them unsuitable for intellectual activities and perpetually inferior to men, thus eternally dependent on their male guardians. In doing so, I have bridged a gap in the existing literature on the educational system in Saudi Arabia, its pedagogy and the state's policies which, as I argued in Chapter 2, were strongly-understudied areas of academia.

Consequently, in agreement with Magolda's theory of self-authorship, I found that Saudi women, throughout the Saudi curriculum, remained at the first stage of self-authorship for a disproportionate period relative to their developmental pattern. The nature of the environment, the restrictive aspect of Saudi society and education, allows for little autonomy. Moreover, student access to information is limited to the messages deemed legitimate by the curriculum or otherwise unsupervised when they access external sources of information, such as traditional media, which becomes an unhealthy environment in which to develop perceptions. Communication in Saudi

society is essentially based on the idea that students are inferior, therefore the figures of authority sometimes blindly exercise their power without necessary prior and adequate training, and men, due to the patriarchal characteristic of Saudi society, are seen as superior so much so that Saudi women find no equals in their everyday lives. Hence, the majority of Saudi women studied developed legitimizing types of identities, according to Castells' theory, and while they might disagree or feel uncomfortable with the rules of their physical environment, they were denied the means to explore any alternatives.

Within this updated, detailed, and critical depiction of Saudi society, complete with empirical research on the ground with the help of a matching theoretical framework owing to both Western and Arab researchers, Chapter 9 examined the impact of Twitter on Saudi women. The results were highly conclusive. Unlike Chaudhry, my results demonstrate a stronger trend, whereby Twitter has a tremendously positive impact on Saudi women. Indeed, my empirical findings point to the fact that, on average, Saudi women find more freedom on Twitter than in reality. This is based on two related observations. First, they are able to use their own names to voice their opinions. This means that Twitter transformed into a platform that allows them to speak their minds and explore their intellectual potentials and critical thinking much more than previously allowed in their claustrophobic, educational system. Second, they can follow debate in a more open space in which they can keep themselves informed about differing views on certain topics, and finally access the type of information necessary to them in order to forge their own sense of identity and decide what they want to believe in.

This has hugely positive impacts on the participants: not only do they testify to a growth in their own self-confidence and acceptance of themselves as they no longer see themselves as the weaker sex on multiple grounds, but they also see more opportunities open to them. Armed with new confidence, they can pursue certain career paths they never considered before, such as going to university, and studying such subjects as politics. Another positive change observed with the introduction of Twitter is a deeper level of insight into the workings of Saudi politics and religion, which leads to a deeper understanding of the fabric of Saudi society for many Saudi women. This translates into a drive to become involved socially and politically in the future, to fight for social reform and women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, as my analyses in Chapters 2 and 5 on the educational setting show, Saudi women grow up in a highly isolated way. They are educated in a protective bubble built by the state, Wahhabism, their parents, and likely, later on by the social norms. Therefore, by choosing Twitter as a virtual platform, they were not sacrificing their social connections in real life as much as they seized an opportunity to become more educated in the broader sense. Only in the universe of Twitter have some participants displayed the type of projected identity not found in the educational environment. As a furthering of Castells' theory of the network society. I can affirm that only in the virtual environment of Twitter can Saudi women build a meaningful network, where the relationship between the individual and the collectives are not vertical, but *horizontal*. This is a crucial theoretical and empirical finding.

The following diagram illustrates the theoretical and empirical achievements of this research, based on the three key findings pertaining to female individuality: identity, perception, and authority.

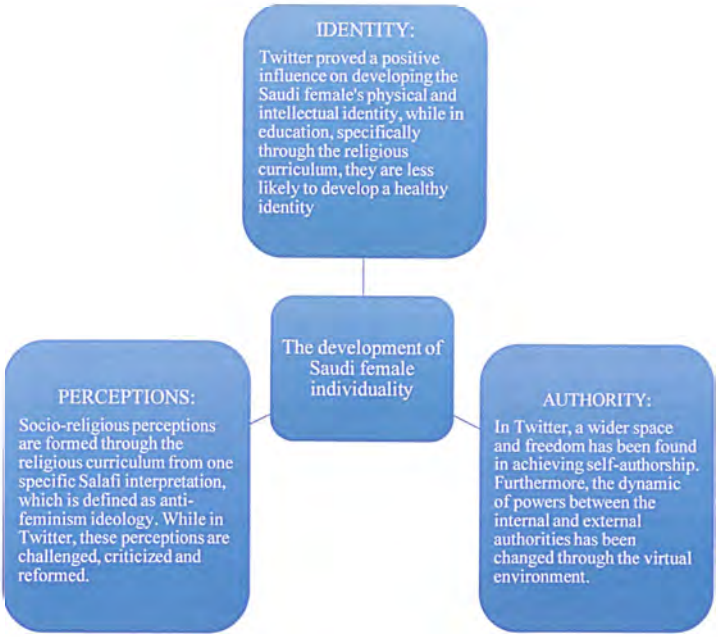


Figure 10.1 Diagram for research achievements

10.2 Methodological Achievements

In Chapter 5, I set out to analyse Saudi textbooks myself, given my proficiency in Arabic and English, in order to uncover the grey areas of reform regarding gendered concepts present within the curriculum under a religious light. As a result of the events of 9/11, a major global historical turning point, Saudi politics shifted to the international stage where, once its exclusiveness and secrecy was lost, it was under strong pressure from international players and institutions to revolutionise its pedagogic messages, in order to depart from the limitation of Wahhabism. However,

my analysis demonstrates that little changed in the textbooks regarding gendered issues and representations and that, except for a few negligible changes, the old curricula were preserved, only under different book-covers. This is a major observation as few studies have used similar methods.

In my investigation of Saudi female individuality, both in the educational environment and the virtual world of Twitter, I gave a voice, primarily, to Saudi women. Empirically speaking, this research is the first conducted this broadly on Saudi female individuality and with such depth of inquiry, through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, both of which are difficult to achieve in Saudi Arabia given the students' young age and most schools' privacy policies. In Chapter 2, I demonstrate that many authors applied foregone conclusions to Saudi women who were used as mere illustrations of their already-expressed argument. In Chapters 6 to 8, I use a reverse method. I produced a network of interpretations based on the Saudi student responses to my observations, questions, and statements. As such, my methodology, admittedly more tedious than drawing conclusions first and afterwards looking for evidence, is a better reflection of Saudi female individuality. It emphasises the importance of empirical data over complex theories in a field of human development where large theories can be easily overwhelmed by the sophistication of human experiences. Moreover, my observational method inside Saudi schools and classrooms was a rare opportunity given the privacy of Saudi schools, and gave unprecedented insights into the foundations of Saudi female individuality.

Female individuality defines a woman's sense of self, including her character and the way in which she relates to her *being* not only as a human, but also as a *gendered*

human. In Chapter 3, I embrace the feminist theory of Simone de Beauvoir in conceptualising gendered identity as a social construct. I highlight the importance of three key concepts in the development of female individuality. The first of these concepts is individualism, defined as the right to free thinking and the freedom of actions for the individual over collectives. The second concept, identity, is explored through an understanding of the private and the public self, defined as the set of social norms and expectations that society projects onto individuals they view as *female*, which the latter must internalise in order to *become* a *woman* according to *societal frameworks*. In other words, every culture's definition of 'woman' is different. For the first time, I applied a Westernised, psychological perspective, together with a coherent theory on feminism and Islamic feminism in order to approach the foundations of female individuality in Saudi Arabia. Not only is this research multicultural, it is also interdisciplinary in terms of its methodology and theoretical framework. This thesis has demonstrated a new, innovative way of examining questions concerning female individuality and its development in the Arab context.

Chapter 9 contributes significantly to the existing understanding of social media, specifically Twitter, in Saudi Arabia through its use of multi methods in understanding two different settings. This new methodology has not been previously used in this context. An observational method inside Saudi schools and classrooms was a rare opportunity in terms of access objectives in regards of Twitter provided a more fully informed understanding of its influence as a new building material for the Saudi female individuality.

Finally, the methodology put forward in this study will be greatly beneficial in the future for psychological, educational and gender research in the Arab region. It will

weigh the methods used, in order to depict a faithful picture of the social dynamics shaping gender identities and perceptions in the Middle East. The rationale behind this methodology is to draw a web of connections, again horizontally, to describe the drivers of human development in the region, rather than providing a framework of hierarchy to rank the factors in a vertical manner. In many ways, the latter approach would have to ignore a great deal of the complexities in the region, as unidirectional or unilateral when it comes to human and gendered development.

10.3. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study should be noted in order to provide a better understanding of the validity and reliability of the findings of this research. Firstly, the analysis of the school environment was limited in that it was exclusive to one school in particular. The school was a renowned institution in the city of Jeddah, which is considered a developed, forward-looking urban area. Hence, my claim to generalizability is limited by the fact that, urban areas being usually the main origins proponent of socio-cultural change, the social traditions and the culture in the chosen Jeddah differ significantly from other cities (as well as rural areas) in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Jeddah is the most liberal city in Saudi. Yet in a way, since my study of the most liberal city showed a high degree of limitation, one plausible hypothesis to make is that there are even fewer rights and less autonomy for Saudi women in other areas. An area worth investigating, albeit difficult given the level of conservatism directly impacting an environment's openness to research, would be the less fortunate women of Saudi Arabia living in more conservative areas of the country. This recommendation is also valid, although less urgent, for the rest of

the Arab world, as most social studies tend to focus on large cities, while the peripheries are usually either only superficially hinted at, or completely ignored.

Another important question regarding the findings in relation to young female Twitter users: In this study, I sought to highlight a chronological story in order to preserve clarity and provide a framework that would not be over-burdened by numerous ramifications given the length of this type of work. Moreover, it was the best approach to uncover the specific differences between the physical and virtual environments. The development of the theoretical perspective for this research and the methodological literature suggested that the best method was to ask the users about their experience, rather than relying on analyses of virtual information, such as tweets analysis programs. The latter could mislead my understanding of the contrast between the physical and the virtual representations of the Saudi female. In a way, Twitter is a virtual society, and similar to any other society, it has codes and individuals project an image of themselves they wish others to see (the public self) , which is not necessarily their private self. Therefore, I proceeded to conduct interviews in order to remain faithful to how Saudi female users felt about and engaged with the platform.

Yet even this method cannot allow me to claim that I gained a comprehensive understanding of what the Saudi female makes of her individuality as a Muslim, be it in the physical environment or on Twitter. However, I can state that this approach was best suited in this situation and was supported by my personal skills as a psychology counsellor. This is based on two main factors: given the sensitivity of the topic, my previous training helped me create a trustworthy and safe environment for the participants to allow themselves to express their opinions as much and as truthfully as

possible during interviews. Secondly, the consistency in their answers, supported by the number of participants interviewed, made it possible to represent a coherent picture of Saudi female identity in both environments, given the general trends that emerged from the interviews. Lastly, no contradictions exist between what the participants expressed regarding the religious curriculum and the evidence I found in the educational setting, as detailed in my analysis of the literature and in Chapter 5.

Nonetheless, one way of improving this aspect of the research would have been to interview a larger sample of Saudi women from varying age categories and with the help of few more researchers, in order to reproduce a clearer trend in the responses. However, work on this large a scale would not have been realistic in the context of the present research. Yet I am hopeful that my research can serve as a model for a new corpus of research that will be based on interviews and observations, to derive theories from empirical findings rather than from deductions that are more theoretical. Giving a voice to Saudi women is the first step towards a better understanding of gender dynamics and individuality in the Middle East, which is an interdisciplinary pursuit.

Finally, the present research is limited in its scope to Saudi women. However, concerns regarding masculinity are not only pressing, but also much the focus of many current sociological and psychological studies. As circumstances in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East have gradually become more problematic, especially with the rise of different ideologies mislabelled with Islamic titles, several questions came to mind after having conducted this study, what does it mean to be a Saudi male? What is the definition of manhood in relation to religion and in relation to feminism in Saudi Arabia? What is the influence of Social media on the definitions of masculinity

in Saudi Arabia? Hence, as a recommendation, future research on definitions of masculinity and personal development in the Middle Eastern countries would be highly beneficial in order to improve current understandings of the influence of social media on cultural and psychological phenomena. I hope that this study functions as a springboard for others to follow and contribute to future generations in the Arab world.

10.4. Final Note

I began this journey in 2010, before witnessing the effect of social media on the political changes of the Middle East. I asked, could social media have an influence on social change, more specifically Islamic understandings gained through education? A question sounded too optimistic and unrealistic. Within the years of this research, social media participated significantly in political changes, revolutions and even in promoting negative ideologies. I began with the desire to understand the development of the female individualism through the religious curricula, and explore the influence of social media on them. I learned that the definition of Saudi female individuality as an Islamic Identity is far more complex than a plain black fabric, and far more rich than a cosmopolitan *personage,* and that understanding the influence of Twitter is only one source of a building material for this complex individual, whether she is "unrealistic" in the physical environment or "realistic" in the virtual environment. I also came to a conclusion that there is much more to learn about Islam as an abstract religion without an instilled specific ideology, be it in education or social media.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Quantitative Method Questionnaires (Both environment: Participants in group A, B & D)

The following section displays the questionnaire design, scoring system and collected data for my quantitative approach. It was the first step in my methodology, and

antedated the phenomenological approach. In Chapter 4, subsection 4.5.1.1., I mentioned that this questionnaire would follow Hofstede's first framework for evaluating the cultural characteristics of a given society, namely Individualism and Collectivism Scale. The aim of this analysis is to provide a contextual picture of Saudi society along the lines of vertical/horizontal collectivism/individualism. This is helpful both in understanding the impact of the physical and virtual environments, and in designing well-tailored questions for the semi-structured interviews later on.

Horizontal individualism (HI) items:

1. I'd rather depend on myself than others.

2. I rely on myself most of the time; I rarely rely on others.

3. I often do "my own thing."

4. My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me.

Vertical individualism (VI) items:

1. It is important that I do my job better than others.

2. Winning is everything.

3. Competition is the law of nature.

4. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused.

Horizontal collectivism (HC) items:

1. If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud.

2. The well-being of my co-workers is important

3. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.

4. I feel good when I cooperate with others.

Vertical collectivism (VC) items:

1. Parents and children must stay together as much as possible

2. It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want.

3. Family members should stick together; no matter what sacrifices are required.

4. It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my groups.

Scoring and Analysis

Each dimension's items are summed up separately to create a VC, VI, HC, and HI score.

4.5.1.4 Survey Data

A measurement tool survey was used to quantitatively analyse the data. The latter involved a 16-item scale designed to measure four dimensions of collectivism and individualism:

1.Vertical Collectivism – seeing the self as a part of a collective and being willing to accept hierarchy and inequality within that collective

2.Vertical Individualism – seeing the self as fully autonomous, but recognizing that inequality will exist among individuals and and accepting this inequality.

3.Horizontal Collectivism –seeing the self as part of a collective but perceiving all the members of that collective as equal.

4.Horizontal Individualism –seeing the self as fully autonomous, and believing that equality between individuals is the ideal.

(Triandis & Gelfland, 1998)

In other words, as Triandis presents "The four defining Attributes of Individualism Collectivism" (Triandis 1995) are given below:

(a) How individuals perceive themselves.

(b) How they relate to others.

(c) The goals they follow

(d) What concerns drive their behaviour.

The scale used was inspired by the works of Matsumoto, Kouznetsova, Ray, Ratzlaff, Biehl and Raroque (1999). The items should be mixed up prior to administering the questionnaire in order to avoid influencing the answers due to their placement on the page. All items are answered on a 9-point scale, ranging from "1= never or definitely no" and "9 = always or definitely yes".

APPENDIX B: Quantitative Method Questionnaires (Arabic Translation) (Both environment: Participants in group A, B & D)

- أفضل الإعتماد على نفسي بدلاً من الإعتماد على غيري أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- أثق في نفسي أغلب الأحيان، ونادرا ما أثق في غيري أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- أقوم بترتيب غرفتي وأغراضي بنفسي في أغلب الأحيان أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- شخصيتي وإعتمادي على نفسي من أهم الأمور بالنسبة إلي أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- من المهم جداً أن أكون متميز. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا

- من المهم أن أقوم بعملي أفضل من غيري أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- النجاح بالنسبة إلي هو كل شيء. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- المنافسة أمر طبيعي جداً. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- أنزعج عندما يقوم غيري بإنجاز عمل أفضل منّي أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- أستمتع عندما أعمل في مشروع وأتنافس مع غيري. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- بعض الناس أهم شيء لديهم هو النجاح، لست واحد منهم. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- من غير تنافس لا يوجد مجتمع جيّد أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- يزعجني كثيرا عندما يقوم غيري بعمل أفضل منّي أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا

- إذا فاز زميلي بجائزة، سأفتخر به. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- سعادة صديقي تهمّني أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- من أمتع الأوقات لدي قضاء وقتي مع الآخرين. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- أحب العمل الجماعي أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- إذا قريبي أحتاج لدعم مادي وأستطيع مساعدته، سوف أقرر مساعدته. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- عندما أعمل مع مجموعة، سأهتم بأن أنسق الإتفاق بيننا. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- أحب مشاركة إهتماماتي مع جاري. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- سعادتي تعتمد على سعادة من حولي. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا

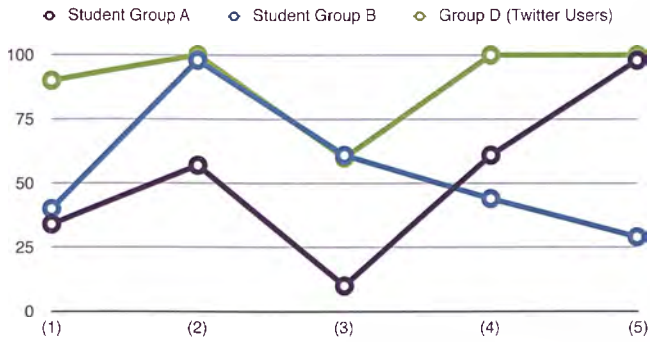
- الآباء والأمهات يجب أن يكونوا دوما مع أبنائهم. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- من واجبي أن أهتم بأمي وأبي حتى إن أضطررت أن أضحي بما أريد أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- العائلة يجب أن تبقى دوما مع بعضها مهما كانت التضحية والخسائر. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- من المهم لدي أن أحترم قرار المجموعة حتى وإن تعارض مع قراري. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- يجب دوما أن نتعلّم أن الواجبات التي علينا أهم من رغباتنا وطموحنا. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا
- أنا دوما أضحّي باهتمامي الشخصي لمصلحة الجماعة. أوافق جدا ١--٢--٣--٤--٥--٦--٧--٨--٩ لا أوافق أبدا

APPENDIX C: Quantitative Method Questionnaires Results (Both environment: Participants in group A, B & D)

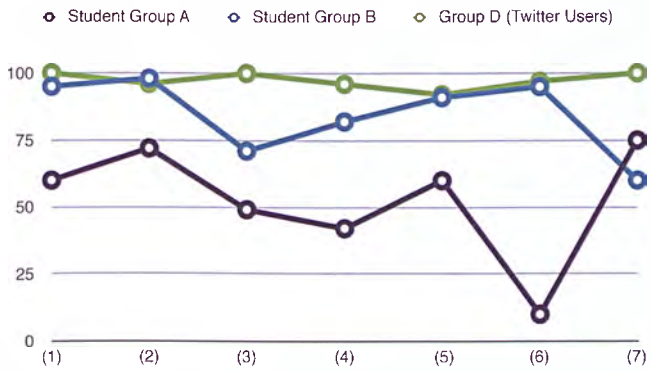
Horizontal vertical collectivism/ individualism Measurement Results.

TRIANDIS & GELFAND (1998):

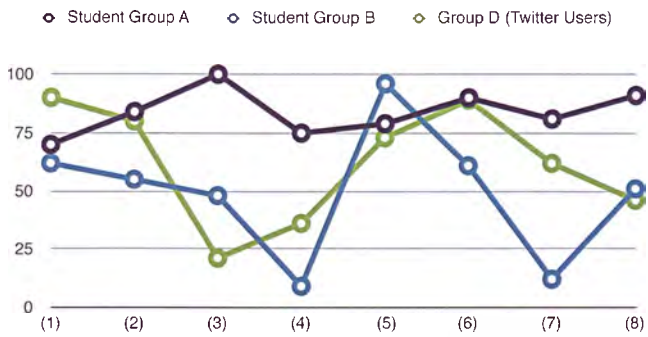
Horizontal Individualism:



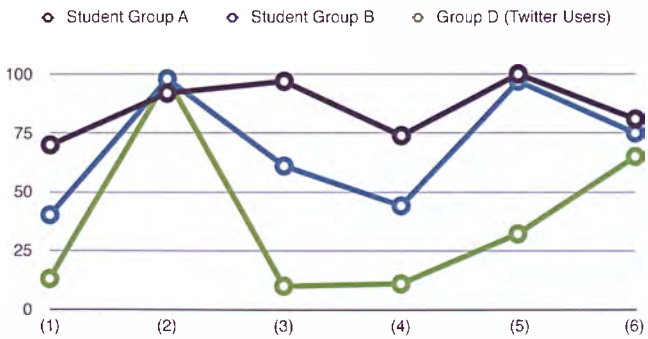
Vertical Individualism:



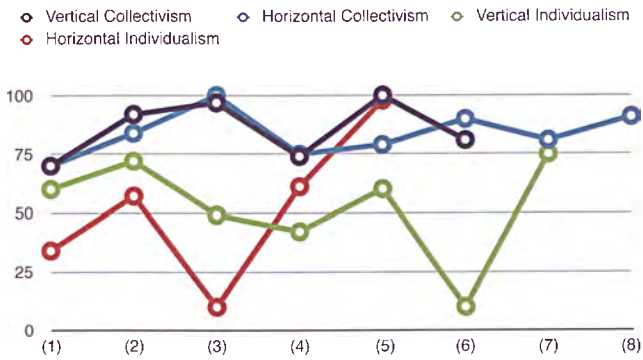
Horizontal Collectivism:



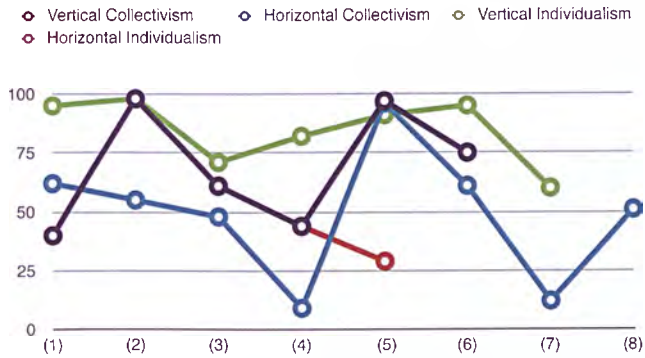
Vertical Collectivism:



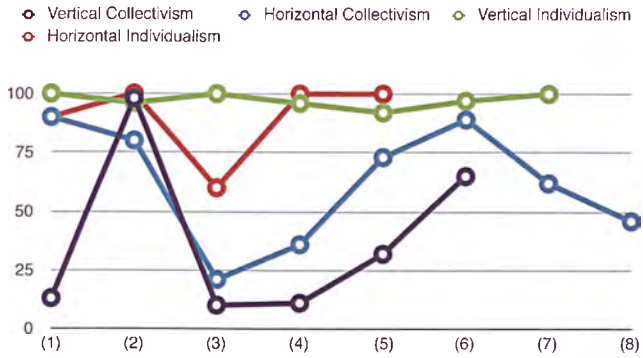
Student Group A



Student Group B



Group D (Twitter Users)



APPENDIX D: Translated Information Sheet about the Study Setting 1: The School in Saudi Arabia.

Dear Principle of the school,

My name is Lina Khashogji. I am currently pursuing my Ph.D. in the United Kingdom at Kingston University. As part of the graduation requirements, I am currently preparing for collecting data to investigate the influence of Islamic curriculum on Saudi females. I am writing this letter to provide you with more information about this research and what your evolvement would entail if you decided to take part.

The aim of this study is to listen to the opinions and behaviours of both students and teachers. Focusing more on the students' voices in this research. Your participation will be of great value in the implantation of this research. Giving the sensitivity of the subject, all data will be treated confidentially, will not be used for purpose other than research. Also participation is totally voluntary.

Research Methods:

- Observations of classrooms, lessons and school environment.
- Interviews with students and teachers of Islamic subjects.
- Interviews with the school principle.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated

Lina Khashogji

Kingston University, London.

APPENDIX E: Observation rubric
(Setting 1: The school /Participants group A, B &C)

Main Idea	Details	Observations	Reflection /questions to ask

APPENDIX F: Translated Information Sheet about the Study Setting 2: Twitter. (Participants Group D)

Dear participants,

My name is Lina Khashogji. I am currently pursuing my Ph.D. in the United Kingdom at Kingston University. As part of the graduation requirements, I am currently preparing for collecting data to investigate the influence of Twitter on Saudi females who were taught in Saudi schools. I am writing this letter to provide you with more information about this research and what your evolvement would entail if you decided to take part.

The aim of this study is to listen to the opinions of young Saudi females who are using the social media platform "Twitter". Your participation will be of great value in the implantation of this research. Giving the sensitivity of the subject, all data will be treated confidentially, will not be used for purpose other than research. Also participation is totally voluntary.

Research Methods:

- Semi-structured interviews. (Face to face or video skype)
- Attached is the expected questions (Interview Protocol)

Your cooperation is highly appreciated

Lina Khashogji

Kingston University, London.

APPENDIX G: Interview Protocol (Semi-structured Interviews) (Virtual environment: Participants group D)

This appendix relates to the methodology described in Chapter 4, subsection 4.5.3., on the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were carried out using Skype calls with camera. Questionnaires were sent to the participants at least two days before the interviews so as to give them time to think about their answers. To collect useful data that could contribute to the research questions, the interview began with general main questions about the participants' opinion on Twitter and in order to put them at ease and to help the participants open up. These introductory questions then led to more specific questions, formed based on the four elements of the Measurement Model for individualism in Twitter described in both 4.5.3. and the introduction to Section II. They were divided into the following sections:

Introductory questions:

Q1. How often do you use Twitter, notably browsing it to receive up-to-date information?

- Do you use any other social media? If so, what's the difference between Twitter and any other social media platform?
- Do you tweet in Arabic or English?

Specific Questions:

<u>To collect the participants' insight on the topic:</u>

Q2. Do you think the nature of virtual environment in Twitter has influenced Saudi female users in a different way than the physical environment? how?

Q3. Has the use of Twitter Saudi women impacted their understanding of female individuality, taught previously in the Islamic curriculum of Saudi Arabia?

Q3. How could the quality and quantity of information in "Twitter" affect female users' beliefs with a background forged by the Islamic curriculum in Saudi Arabia?

- How do you find the difference regarding the quality/quantity of information between the platform of Twitter and Islamic school studies?
- How does Twitter act in term of connecting individuals together?
- In your opinion, how accurate and current is the knowledge "on Islam" you find on Twitter?
- How open is Twitter in terms of freedom of expression and questioning about religion compared to Saudi schools?

Q4. Has the nature of the platform of "Twitter" changed or reformed women's understanding of Islamic concepts taught in schools?

Q5. On ways in which Twitter and the Islamic curriculum could have an impact in forming gender roles in Saudi Arabia:

- How could Twitter impact the Wahhabi ideology implemented in school during Islamic studies?
- In your opinion, how could Twitter participate in a process of educational reform, specifically of the Islamic curriculum?

<u>To collect information on their personal experience:</u>

Q1. How do you define yourself on Twitter? Do you use your own name or a pseudonym? Do you personalize your profile to better represent you?

Q2. Do you believe that Twitter has helped you re-define your identity? If so, how?

Q3. Has Twitter challenged any of your socio-religious perceptions? If so, how?

Q4. Do you think Twitter has changed the way you act and behave as a Saudi Muslim woman? If so, how?