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Environmental Portraits of Saudi Women Entrepreneurs: A Digital Ethnography Study

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Abstract

The study investigates Saudi women's experiences as social media entrepreneurs, within the context of the Saudi national reform plan, Saudi Vision 2030 (SV2030), which defines women as labour assets and aims to “empower” them in the workforce, by analysing how they navigate the external and internal structural opportunities and constraints during the implementation of SV2030. Research about the visual representation of Saudi women at work is very limited mostly due to socio-cultural factors that preclude it. This study seeks to address this by documenting Saudi women entrepreneurs' visual representation and by determining whether it hinders or enhances their entrepreneurial activity and, by extension, their socio-economic and political standing in Saudi society. The research develops an innovative integrated theoretical framework which explains the digital visual labour of Saudi women social media entrepreneurship. In terms of methodology, this is a qualitative case study using a mix of research techniques for triangulation purposes: digital visual ethnography with online participant observation (24 Instagram accounts), including semi-structured interviews of those same research participants with the scroll-back method online, and offline via photo-elicitation with nine research participants at their workplace, as well as eight expert online interviews. The resulting three data sets were analysed thematically using deductive, inductive, and co-analysis methods.

Keywords: digital visual ethnography, women entrepreneurs, social media