

Saudi Women in Sports and Vision 2030: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Representation and Ideological Shifts

Muhammad Marwan Ismail¹, Farah Nadia Harun^{1*}, Nurhasma Muhammad Saad¹,
Wan Moharani Mohammad¹, Zulkipli Md Isa¹

¹ Fakulti Pengajian Bahasa Utama, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: farahnadia@usim.edu.my

Received: 13 December 2025 | Accepted: 21 February 2026 | Published: 1 March 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajress.2026.8.1.48>

Abstract: *Saudi Vision 2030, launched in 2016, has marked a turning point in Saudi Arabia's social transformation, particularly in expanding opportunities for women. Prior to this initiative, Saudi women faced extensive restrictions, including prohibitions on sports participation and requirements for male guardianship in many aspects of daily life. International media often highlighted these struggles, while local outlets defended them as rooted in Islamic and tribal traditions. This study critically examines how Al-Jazirah (AJ) and Al-Arabia (AA), among Saudi Arabia's most prominent Arabic online news outlets, represented women's involvement in sports before and after Vision 2030. Using Fairclough's textual-oriented Critical Discourse Analysis, Wodak's discourse-historical approach, and Van Dijk's framework on discourse and ideology, the research analyzes presupposition strategies in AJ's coverage of Saudi women between 2010 and 2025. Findings reveal a marked discursive shift: prior to 2016, AJ presupposed women's participation as restricted and contested, while post-2016 coverage increasingly normalized and celebrated their achievements. By 2025, AA actively encouraged women's engagement in sports, reflecting broader ideological realignments under Vision 2030. This study highlights how presupposition strategies function as subtle mechanisms of power, shaping public perception and legitimizing social change in Saudi Arabia.*

Keywords: Saudi Women; Sports; Arabic Online News; Critical Discourse Analysis; Presupposition

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia occupies a distinctive position in the Muslim world, being home to the two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, and often portrayed as the most committed to Islamic teachings. For decades, Saudi women were represented in both local and international media as bound by strict cultural and religious norms—wearing the hijab, fulfilling roles as mothers and wives, and living under the authority of male guardians. Their social participation was largely confined to domestic and family spheres, while Saudi men engaged freely in economic, political, and sporting activities. These restrictions contributed to persistent stereotypes in Western media, which frequently depicted Saudi women as passive, oppressed, and excluded from public life.

Sports, a central aspect of Saudi society—particularly football—highlighted this gender divide. While Saudi men achieved notable success internationally, women were prohibited from

participating in sporting events or even attending matches. This exclusion became a focal point of global debates on gender equality, with international media criticizing Saudi policies, while local outlets often defended them as necessary to preserve cultural and religious values. The launch of **Saudi Vision 2030** in 2016 marked a turning point, introducing reforms that gradually expanded women's rights and opened new opportunities for their involvement in sports. By 2025, women were not only permitted to attend stadiums but also encouraged to participate in both local and international competitions, reflecting the broader transformation of Saudi society.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates how Saudi women's participation in sports has been represented in Arabic online news discourses, focusing on **Al-Jazirah (AJ)** and **Al-Arabia (AA)**. These outlets, while both prominent, differ in orientation: AJ is traditionally conservative and closely aligned with state and religious values, whereas AA adopts a more modern and globally oriented approach. By analyzing news coverage from 2010 to 2025, this study explores how presupposition strategies were employed to construct narratives of restriction, struggle, and eventual empowerment. Using the frameworks of Fairclough's textual-oriented CDA, Wodak's discourse-historical approach, and van Dijk's ideology critique, the analysis reveals how linguistic choices in Saudi media both reflected and shaped shifting ideologies surrounding women's roles in sports under the Vision 2030 reforms.

2. Literature Review

Research on the linguistic representation of women has long highlighted gender asymmetries in discourse. Corpus-based studies consistently show that references to men (e.g., *man, men, he, him*) far outnumber those to women (*woman, women, she, her*) in both spoken and written corpora (Biber et al., 1999; Kjellmer, 1986; Romaine, 2001). In Arabic contexts, Sadiqi (2003) demonstrated how gendered grammar reinforces structural and discursive sexism, while Pearce (2008), analyzing collocations in the British National Corpus, found that women were often characterized by appearance, whereas men were associated with strength. These findings underscore the broader tendency to portray women as passive or secondary actors in discourse. Specific to Saudi Arabia, Kaufer and Al-Malki (2009) examined 32 news articles between 2005 and 2007 and identified recurring lexical items such as *discrimination, guardian, religion, and segregation*, concluding that Saudi women were predominantly depicted as "weak and passive." Shameer (2016) argued that media plays a pivotal role in raising women's issues, shaping public perceptions of their achievements and contributions. Rubin (2007), drawing on Freedom House data, emphasized the slow progress of Arab women compared to global trends, with Saudi Arabia scoring among the lowest in gender equality indicators.

Saudi Arabia's case is distinctive due to its symbolic centrality in the Muslim world and its resistance to external influences (Ahmed, 1992). Traditional norms, reinforced by religious interpretations, have historically constrained women's participation in public life (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Media representations often reinforced these restrictions, portraying Saudi women as exotic, oppressed, or victims of segregation (Hamdan, 2005; Shannon, 2014). Taher (2019) linked these portrayals to Orientalist discourses that construct Muslim women as the "negative other."

Recent scholarship, however, reveals a discursive shift. Elyas et al. (2020) found that Saudi women were increasingly represented as active social actors in local media, echoing earlier findings by Shahrani (2015) and Al-Sudairy (2017). Altorki (2012) highlighted the interplay of ideology, behavior, and religious doctrine in shaping women's evolving roles, while

Kabgani (2012) demonstrated that media coverage is rarely impartial, often reflecting institutional ideologies.

Women in Sports and Media Representation

Historically, Saudi Arabia was among the few nations prohibiting women from participating in international sporting events. Fatwas by prominent scholars, such as Ibn Baz (1991), justified restrictions on the grounds of preventing gender mixing. Yet, by the London 2012 Olympics, Saudi women's participation sparked heated debates, reflecting tensions between tradition and reform. The government's gradual lifting of restrictions—such as allowing women into stadiums in 2017—signaled the beginning of a new era.

Recent studies provide evidence of transformation under **Vision 2030**. Angerer (2025) examined women's sports and social inclusion in Saudi Arabia, noting that government investment in sports infrastructure and health initiatives has significantly expanded opportunities for female participation, aligning with broader modernization goals¹. Ajeel et al. (2025) analyzed representations of Saudi female athletes in Western and Arab media, revealing contrasting narratives: Western outlets often framed them as symbols of resistance, while Arab media increasingly portrayed them as empowered national representatives². Similarly, recent accounts of Saudi women's sporting achievements highlight their growing visibility and recognition both locally and internationally³.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Presupposition Strategies

Within CDA, presupposition strategies are crucial for uncovering hidden ideologies. Fairclough (2003) categorized assumptions into existential, propositional, and value-laden, while Wodak (2001, 2007) emphasized their role in naturalizing contested meanings. Van Dijk (1998, 2006) argued that presuppositions reproduce social power by presenting ideological assumptions as taken-for-granted truths. In Saudi media, presuppositions have historically reinforced exclusionary practices, but post-2016 coverage increasingly presupposes reform and empowerment, embedding women's participation in sports as both natural and desirable.

Saudi Vision 2030 is Saudi Arabia's long-term national transformation plan launched in 2016 to diversify its economy, reduce dependence on oil, and modernize society across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. It is spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and aims to position the Kingdom as a global hub connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa. Saudi Vision 2030 places women's empowerment at the heart of its transformation agenda, leading to historic reforms that have expanded their rights, workforce participation, and social visibility. Female participation in the labour market has already surpassed Vision 2030's original targets, signalling a profound shift in Saudi society. Saudi Vision 2030 has transformed women's role in society from restricted participation to active leadership in the economy and public life. The rapid rise in female workforce participation shows that women are not just beneficiaries of reform but are becoming drivers of Saudi Arabia's modernization and diversification goals.

In term of the background of the two modern standard Arabic online news outlets which were selected for this study, both AJ and AA represent the most prominent Saudi media. *Al-Jazirah* (literally this Arabic word means peninsular) is daily broadsheet news published in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and it very well-known as conservative and pro-Islamic, as well as the pro-Saudi government. Since its foundation in 1960 by Sheikh Khamis, the circulation of AJ has reached many Arab and European countries. AJ is known as one of Saudi Arabia's essential news providers, particularly regarding the local Saudi's content to be broadcasted not only for the

local readers but also to the international crowds. Hence, AJ news reports cover all aspects of Saudi's economic, politic, social as well as culture and belief both locally and internationally. Despite preserving the conservative Saudi's values, AJ was the first Saudi daily news outlet offered an online news service in 1996. Furthermore, AJ was also the first to launch online women's daily to cover the news regarding Saudi Women achievements and the latest development around them in 2011.

Although AA does not have the long history record compared to AJ and was originally based in Dubai before moved to Riyadh, the outlet has grown rapidly and quickly gained a lot of attention among the Arab people not only in Saudi but also worldwide. AA also has taken a more modern approaches in delivering its content to the audience compared to AJ and in return the outlet has dominated a much younger generation of viewers. With the benefit from the rapid development of communication technology, the access for online news from both news outlets has reached millions of readers every day through open access of the respective official online news portal¹.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** approach to examine how Saudi women's participation in sports has been represented in Arabic online news discourses before and after the launch of **Saudi Vision 2030**. CDA is particularly suited to this research because it interrogates the relationship between language, ideology, and power, revealing how discourse both reflects and shapes social realities.

Analytical Frameworks

The analysis draws upon three complementary CDA traditions:

- **Fairclough's Textual-Oriented CDA (1989, 1992, 1995, 2003):** Provides a three-dimensional model linking textual analysis (micro-level linguistic features) with discursive practice (production and consumption of texts) and social practice (broader socio-political structures). This framework enables the study to connect linguistic choices with ideological positions embedded in Saudi media.
- **Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (1996, 2001, 2007):** Emphasizes the importance of historical and socio-political context in discourse construction. This approach is particularly relevant given Saudi Arabia's unique cultural and religious background, and the transformative reforms introduced under Vision 2030.
- **Van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Analysis (1998, 2006):** Focuses on how presuppositions and implicit meanings reproduce power relations and ideological positions. Van Dijk's framework helps uncover how Saudi media naturalized restrictions before 2016 and later normalized women's empowerment.

Presupposition Strategies

The study pays special attention to **presupposition strategies** as linguistic devices that encode assumptions and present contested meanings as taken-for-granted truths. Following Levinson (1983), Reah (2002), Richardson (2007), and Fairclough (2003), presuppositions are identified through:

- **Change-of-state verbs** (e.g., *begin, stop, continue*)
- **Definite and possessive articles** (e.g., *the issue of obesity among Saudi women*)
- **Wh-questions** (e.g., *Which group is responsible...*)

¹ AJ official news portal can be accessed at www.al-jazirah.com, while AA online news is found at www.alarabiya.net.

- **Quantifying adjectives/nouns** (e.g., *the old way of preventing women...*)
- **Referential expressions, factives, and cleft sentences** (e.g., *It was the extremists who...*)

These linguistic cues are analyzed to reveal how Saudi media framed women's participation in sports as restricted, contested, or normalized across different periods.

Data Collection

- **Corpus:** 100 online news articles (50 from Al-Jazirah [AJ] and 50 from Al-Arabia [AA]) were selected from 2010–2015 (pre-Vision 2030) and 2021–2025 (post-Vision 2030).
- **Selection Criteria:** Articles explicitly addressing Saudi women's involvement in sports, restrictions, debates, or achievements.
- **Sources:** Official online archives of AJ and AA, ensuring authenticity and representativeness.

The corpus was balanced to capture both conservative (AJ) and modernist (AA) perspectives, reflecting ideological diversity within Saudi media.

Analytical Procedures

- a) **Textual Analysis:** Identification of presupposition triggers and linguistic structures.
- b) **Discursive Practice Analysis:** Examination of how news outlets framed debates, restrictions, and reforms.
- c) **Social Practice Analysis:** Linking discursive strategies to broader socio-political transformations under Vision 2030.
- d) **Comparative Analysis:** Contrasting AJ's conservative framing with AA's modernist narratives to highlight ideological differences.

Recent Methodological Developments

To strengthen validity, this study incorporates **advances in CDA and media discourse research (2020–2025):**

- **Corpus-assisted CDA:** Integration of keyword and collocation analysis to identify recurring lexical patterns (Baker et al., 2021).
- **Digital Media Analysis:** Consideration of online readership, interactivity, and comment sections as part of discursive practice (Alghamdi, 2022).
- **Intersectional CDA:** Attention to how gender intersects with religion, culture, and nationalism in Saudi media (Mahmoud & Elyas, 2023).
- **Longitudinal CDA:** Tracking discursive shifts across a 15-year period to capture the impact of Vision 2030 reforms (Angerer, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

All data were drawn from publicly available online archives. The study avoids imposing external value judgments, focusing instead on uncovering the ideological mechanisms embedded in discourse. By situating findings within Saudi Arabia's socio-cultural context, the analysis respects local sensitivities while maintaining critical rigor.

4. Result Analysis and Discussion

A total of 80 Arabic online news articles related to the participation of Saudi women in sports have been selected for this study. The number of articles is 50 for each of AJ and AA to avoid any bias in the analysis. It is important to note that, as the Saudi women have been restricted from actively involved in sporting events and participate in a sports tournament, the topic only

appear in the online news report occasionally. Hence, limit the number of articles related to this topic in the archive of AJ and AA from 2010 until 2014. The number of online news articles related to Saudi women and sport reached its peak at least on three occasions from 2010 to 2014, namely:

- a) The year 2010 and 2012. The ban on Saudi Private Schoolgirl from practising sports activities in their school.
- b) The first-ever participation of three female Saudi athletes in the 2012 London Olympic.
- c) The year 2014. The intensive campaign in Saudi to encourage women involving in sports for their health.

It is important to note that, the data collected for this analysis which was retrieved for the respective news outlet archives does not have a balanced and equal coverage. AJ data are mostly covered when the issue during the restriction was implemented (before 2016). In contrast, most of the AA data are centered on the Saudi women achievements after the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030. This is to say that AJ provide ample coverage on the first occasion when the Saudi authority pronounces the decision to prevent Saudi Girl from practising sport in their school. Moreover, AJ focuses on the intensive campaign calling for Saudi women to look after their health in 2014 by practising sports. AA news archive provides more recent news articles (2021 – 2025) on the significant development recorded by Saudi Women in many areas including their participation in local and international sporting events.

This study analysed 80 Arabic online news articles from *Al-Jazirah* (AJ) and *Al-Arabia* (AA) covering Saudi women's participation in sports between 2010 and 2025. The distribution of coverage reflects the ideological orientations of the two outlets: AJ's reporting concentrated on the pre-Vision 2030 period, emphasizing restrictions and debates, while AA's coverage was more prominent in the post-2016 era, highlighting achievements and reforms. This imbalance itself is significant, as it illustrates how media institutions selectively frame women's roles in line with broader political and cultural agendas.

Presupposition Strategies in Al-Jazirah before the Saudi Vision 2030

The analysis of 50 online news articles of Al-Jazirah around the topic of Saudi women participation in sports shows that the outlets have strategically utilised the presupposition strategies to presuppose these four main ideas, namely:

- a) Saudi women participation in sports is limited.
- b) The struggle between two groups, the supporters of women participation in sport and the other who against it.
- c) The existence of special law which limits women from actively involved in sports.
- d) The efforts to encourage Saudi women to practice sports.

First Theme: Limited Participation

- In the first theme, Al-Jazirah carefully used presupposition strategies to highlight the limitation of Saudi women taking part in sports, for example, the outlets mentioned in the online news:

5/5/2012

وكشف الصالح على أنه في حال فتح المجال للنساء لممارسة الرياضة فإن المبارزة ستحظى بقبول النساء، بل سيكون لها شعبية أكبر

Al-Saleh revealed that if women are allowed to play sports, fencing will be accepted by women and will be even more popular.

(Previously, Saudi women were not allow participated in sports, until recently Saudi government has considered their participation.)

8/5/2014

مشيراً إلى أن الشعب السعودي متابع لكرة القدم إضافة إلى الفتيات بدأن في الآونة الأخيرة بمتابعة وتشجيع كرة القدم ولكن ليست بالمشاهدة الفعلية، مبيناً أن الوقت الحالي توجد مطالبات بالسماح للرياضة النسائية على الأقل في المدارس وهي تحت الدراسة وأنه يوجد فعلياً أندية رياضية نسائية في الأحياء.

He pointed out that the Saudi people follow the football, as well as girls, have recently started to follow and encourage football but not the actual viewing, noting that currently there are demands to allow women's sports at least in schools while understudying and that there are sports clubs women in neighbourhoods.

(There is still some restriction facing by Saudi women in joining sport even though merely as spectators, for instance in a football match.)

7/6/2014

لم يعد يخلو شارع رئيسي أو فرعي من نادٍ رجالي لمزاولة الرياضة، بينما من النادر جداً أن نجد مثل هذه المحلات للنساء، ما أدى إلى رفع أسعار هذه الخدمات المحصورة للنساء في محلات معينة ونادرة،

There is no longer a main street or a branch of a men's club to practice sports, while it is scarce to find such shops for women, which led to raising the prices of these services reserved for women in individual shops and rare,

(It is difficult for Saudi women looking for their sport needs as the price is much higher compare to the men.)

31/3/2010

البنات أصبحن يمارسن الرياضة في الكلية ومتى توفرت الإمكانيات في المدارس وتحققت الأولويات والبنية الأساسية التحتية بالإمكان مناقشة

Girls are now playing sports in college, and when the possibilities are available in schools, priorities and infrastructure are achieved.

Second Theme: Struggle

- In the second theme, Al-Jazirah strategically used presupposition strategies to show two different groups of supporters and against participating Saudi women in sports, for example, the outlets mentioned in the online news:

Supporters argument

31/3/2010

- إذن لماذا اللغط الدائر على الرياضة النسائية بين فئة ترى أنها ضرورة من ضروريات الحياة ولا بد من فرضها في مدارس البنات وفئة ترى خطورة ذلك على أخلاق البنات وحياتهن؟!

- So why the ado on the women's sports between the category of view that it is a necessity of life and must be imposed in the schools of girls and a class sees the seriousness of this on the morals of girls and their lives?

أن الرياضة ذاتها ليست هدفاً لدى كثير من المنادين بها كحق مشروع للنساء إنما هي وسيلة لتنفيذ أجندة تغريبية واضحة. إنما الخلاف في كيفية هذه الممارسة وما قد يترتب عليها فيما بعد،

The sport itself is not a goal of many advocates as a legitimate right for women but a means of implementing a clear alienation agenda. But the disagreement about how this practice and what it might entail later,

بعض الكتاب الذين يمارسون الشتم والقذف ضد المتدينين بأشنع الصفات يهتمهم إلى درجة كبيرة أن يبقى هذا الصراع المحتدم بينهم من جهة وبين المحافظين من جهة أخرى مستمراً لنصب الحبال

Some writers practising insults and slander against religious people in the ugliest qualities are interested in a large extent that this conflict between them on the one hand and the conservatives, on the other hand, continues to erect

Non-supporters' argument

31/3/2010

- أيا أيها المتشددون الظلاميون يا من تعانون الكبت الجنسي حسب وصف بعض الكتاب انتظروا ولا تستعجلوا فإن بقيت منافسات الأولمبياد النسائي داخل القاعات المغلقة بعيداً عن أعين الرجال فليس لكم (الإنكار) أما ان رأيتم الكاميرات تقتحم - *Whoa, the dark extremists, who suffer sexual repression, according to some writers. Whatever you militants obscurantists O suffer sexual repression described by some writers and waited for the Rush Women's Olympic competitions remained in closed halls away from the eyes of men is not you (denial), but you have seen that the cameras intrude*

(These news reports show examples of arguments that against the participating of Saudi women in sports.)

9/4/2014

ورأى نصر الله أن مشاركة المرأة في الرياضة تعد من القضايا التي ينبغي أن تُحسم.

Nasrallah considered that the participation of women in sports is one of the issues that should be resolved.

(Saudi women participating in sports should not be an issue.)

8/5/2012

أن يعيد الرافضون قراءة وتحليل معطيات الواقع برؤية أشمل وبفهم أعمق للواقع وبعد اطلاع موسع على ما قاله أهل الاختصاص من الأطباء والنفسيين والاجتماعيين والتربويين بل وحتى الشرعيين ليكون منهم حسم الأمر

The rejectionists re-read and analyse the facts of the reality with a more comprehensive vision and a deeper understanding of reality and after an extensive review of what the specialists said of the doctors, psychologists, socialists, educators and even the legitimate ones to resolve them.

(Some professionals like doctors, educators are also involved in sports and strongly urge women to involve in sports activities.)

ما زالت الرياضة النسائية في أوساطنا الثقافية والعلمية بل وحتى الشعبية والشبابية بين أخذ ورد،

Women's sports in our cultural, scientific and even popular and youth circles are still taking place,

8/5/2012

هل بالفعل الرياضة النسائية في مدارسنا وكتباتنا ومعاهدنا التربوية والتعليمية والفنية التقنية باب شر أم أنه على العكس مفتاح خير وسبب أكيد لاستقرارنا الأسري ولسعادتنا الزوجية ولصحة فتياتنا ونسائنا النفسية والجسدية؟

Is it women's sports in our schools and colleges and institutes of education, education and the technical door of evil or is it, on the contrary, the key to a good and a sure reason for our family stability and marital happiness and the health of our girls and women psychological and physical?

8/5/2012

وقال الدكتور الفيفي إن الرياضة للمرأة من السنة النبوية.. فلماذا منع ذلك منعاً مطلقاً وعدم تنظيمه؟! وكل ما يثار من تحفظات على هذه التوصية.. لا يعدو تشدداً وسيعاً لفرض أعراف اجتماعية.. على الناس اعتسافاً..

Dr. al-Fifi said that the sport for women from the Sunnah of the Prophet. Why prevented it absolutely and not regulated? All reservations raised on this recommendation are strict and broad to impose social norms on people.

9/4/2014

(A scholar, Dr Al-Fifi, said that the restriction of Saudi women could not participating in sports is a norm, nothing related to the religion.)

فهؤلاء المحتجون لهم تاريخ طويل في إعاقة برامج الدولة.. في التطور والتنمية

These protesters have a long history of obstructing state programs in development

9/4/2014

(Saudi women could not take part in sports as there is a group of protestors against the issue.)

Third Theme: Laws

- In the third theme, Al-Jazirah strategically used presupposition strategies to show that there is a specific law in preventing Saudi women participated in sports, for example, the outlets mentioned in the online news:

إن أجهزة السير الرياضية صارت جزءاً من مكونات الأثاث في البيت السعودي والسبب المنع من الرياضة سواء نظامياً أو عرفياً. أن قوانين العيب الاجتماعي لا تمكن بنت حواء أن تمارس رياضة المشي في الممشى المخصص

The sports walking devices have become part of the furniture components in the Saudi home and the reason for the ban from sports, whether regular or customary. The laws of social disadvantage do not enable Bint Eve to practice walking in the designated walkway

8/5/2012

وكل ما يثار من تحفظات على هذه التوصية.. لا يعدو تشدداً وسيعاً لفرض أعراف اجتماعية.. على الناس اعتسافاً..

All reservations raised on this recommendation are strict and broad to impose social norms on people.

9/4/2014

(The group that against Saudi women taking part in sports just because of the norm.)

أن هذه الأنشطة ستكون بعيداً عن أعين الرجال وفي صالات مغلقة مخصصة لهن داخل سكن الطالبات في جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز. وما دام أن الأمر كذلك فلا إشكال في إقامة مثل هذه المنافسات بين الطالبات لأنها داخلية في اللهو المباح.

These activities will be away from the eyes of men and in closed halls dedicated to them inside the dormitories of students at King Abdulaziz University. As long as this is so, there is no problem in the establishment of such competitions among students because they are involved in permissible fun.

31/3/2010

Fourth theme: Efforts

- In the fourth theme, Al-Jazirah strategically used presupposition strategies to highlight the efforts in encouraging Saudi women to actively involved in sports, for example, the outlets mentioned in the online news:

فالرياضة النسائية في نظري صارت اليوم ضرورة ملحة وليست مجرد ترفيه وتسلية

In my opinion, women's sport has become an urgent necessity, not just entertainment

8/5/2012

أن السمنة أصبحت منتشرة بين الطالبات في مختلف المراحل. فهؤلاء المحتجون لهم تاريخ طويل في إعاقة برامج الدولة.. في التطور والتنمية

Obesity has become widespread among female students at various stages. These protesters have a long history of obstructing state programs in development

9/4/2014

(A group of protestors that against Saudi women cannot actively involve in sports is among the reason contributing to this obesity issue.)

12/4/2012

يتسبب عدم ممارسة النساء للرياضة في إصابة 50% من النساء في المملكة العربية السعودية بهشاشة العظام.
The lack of exercise in women causes osteoporosis in 50% of women in Saudi Arabia.

إن إقرار الرياضة النسائية في مدارسنا ومن وجهة نظر شخصية صرفة حل لكثير من المشاكل الصحية والنفسية
The adoption of women's sports in our schools and from a purely personal solution to many health and psychological problems

18/11/2014

وقد جاءت حملة المشي التي هدفت إلى دعم مريضات سرطان الثدي والمتعافيات منه تأكيداً لأهمية دور الرياضة في تعزيز صحة المرأة، ونشر الوعي الصحي للحفاظ عليها.

The walking campaign, aimed at supporting breast cancer patients and their recovery, underlined the importance of the role of sport in promoting women's health and raising health awareness to preserve it.

Presupposition Strategies in Al-Arabiya during the Saudi Vision 2030

On the other hand, the analysis of another 50 online news articles of Al-Arabiya around the same topic of Saudi women participation in sports shows that the outlets have strategically utilised the presupposition strategies to presuppose four main ideas, namely:

- Saudi women participation in sports is increased with much broader participation recorded.
- Saudi Vision 2030 opens wide opportunities for women to excel in sports.
- The continues efforts to encourage Saudi women to practice sports.
- Local and International recognition for Saudi women achievements in sports.

The details discussion on these four main ideas strategically presupposed by AA are as follow:

First Theme: Much Broader Participation

- In the first theme, AA strategically utilised presupposition strategies to highlight the significant increase in Saudi women participation in sporting events and they actively participate in sports which was prevented previously by the government:

وفي المجال الرياضي، حققت السعوديات 1,956 جائزة محلية ودولية، في مؤشر على اتساع حضور المرأة السعودية في المنافسات الإقليمية والدولية.

كشف التقرير أن نسبة السعوديات (18 سنة فأكثر) الممارسات للنشاط البدني بمعدل 150 دقيقة أو أكثر أسبوعياً بلغت 44.6%. كما أظهرت النتائج مشاركة ملحوظة في الأنشطة الثقافية والترفيهية، حيث جاءت زيارة الحدائق والمتنزهات في المرتبة الأولى بنسبة 62.7%.

21/8/2025

لطالما شكّلت الرياضة جزءاً أصيلاً من ثقافة المجتمع السعودي، لكن السنوات الأخيرة شهدت تحوُّلاً جذرياً في هذا القطاع الحيوي،
25/4/2025

قفزة في عدد الأندية والاتحادات الرياضية

بحسب تقرير رؤية السعودية 2030 لعام 2024، شهدت المملكة نمواً كبيراً في البنية التحتية الرياضية. ففي عام 2019، كان عدد الأندية الرياضية 9 فقط، لكن بنهاية 2024 ارتفع الرقم ليصل إلى 128 نادياً.
25/4/2025

In another news report, AA highlighted the dramatic increased in Saudi Women participation event in the type of sports previously prevented for them.

كما ارتفع عدد الاتحادات الرياضية من 32 اتحاداً في 2015 إلى 97 اتحاداً في نهاية عام 2024، ما يعكس توسعاً شاملاً في نشاطات ومجالات الرياضة داخل المملكة.

أصبح تمثيل السيدات بارزاً على المستوى الوطني، مع وجود 40 فريقاً نسائياً يمثل المملكة في 25 اتحاداً رياضياً مختلفاً. وقد ساعدت الإصلاحات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية في فتح آفاق جديدة أمام السعوديات، مما مكّنهن من دخول مجالات عمل متنوعة لم تكن متاحة لهن من قبل.
8/3/2025

Second Theme: Vision 2030

AA news coverage clearly indicated that the SW great achievement in sports is a direct result of Saudi Vision 2030 which was launched in 2016 and lift many of the restrictions which prevent women from making progress in sport activities.

الرياضة السعودية.. تحوُّل شامل يقوده طموح رؤية 2030

25/4/2025

شكّلت الرياضة جزءاً أصيلاً من ثقافة المجتمع السعودي، لكن السنوات الأخيرة شهدت تحوُّلاً جذرياً في هذا القطاع الحيوي، مع انطلاق رؤية السعودية 2030 التي جعلت من تطوير الرياضة أولوية استراتيجية لتحسين جودة الحياة،
25/4/2025

ويعد تمكين المرأة أحد أهم أهداف رؤية المملكة 2030، الأمر الذي يسهم في رفع التنمية وازدهار الاقتصاد الوطني.
8/3/2025

لكن السنوات الأخيرة شهدت تحوُّلاً جذرياً في هذا القطاع الحيوي، مع انطلاق رؤية السعودية 2030 التي جعلت من تطوير الرياضة أولوية استراتيجية لتحسين جودة الحياة، وتعزيز حضور المملكة على الساحة الرياضية الإقليمية والدولية.
25/4/2025

Third Theme: Continues Efforts

Since the launched of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016 the government has unveil many efforts to support women to excel in sport, which was not the case before 2016 when many women have been restricted in many sporting events.

التوجه لتطوير المواهب الرياضية بات واضحاً ضمن برنامج "تكوين" الذي أنشأ 16 مركزاً تدريبياً للشباب ويدير 11 برنامجاً لتطوير المواهب.
25/4/2025

التطورات التي شهدتها قطاع الرياضة في المملكة خلال أقل من عقد، تؤكد أن الرؤية لا تقتصر على الترفيه أو المنافسة فقط، بل تمتد لتشمل تمكين المرأة، وتوسيع قاعدة المشاركة،
25/4/2025

إن الإنجازات التي حققتها المرأة السعودية خلال السنوات الأخيرة تعكس التزام المملكة بتمكينها ومنحها الفرص لتحقيق طموحاتها.
8/3/2025

ومع استمرار الإصلاحات والتشريعات الداعمة، يُتوقع أن تشهد الأعوام القادمة مزيدًا من التقدم في مختلف المجالات، مما يعزز دور المرأة السعودية كلاعب أساسي في مسيرة التحول الوطني والتنمية المستدامة.
8/3/2025

Fourth Theme: International Recognition

Part of the main goals of Saudi Vision 2030 is to make the country at the same level of international standard and to be known as a global leader in many aspects economically and social. Hence, SW achievements in sports derived by the Saudi Vision 2030 has grab not only local recognition but also well known internationally. This is a total contrast of situation before 2016, where many international sport bodies heavily criticised Saudi in their policy of restricting women from joining sporting events.

لكن السنوات الأخيرة شهدت تحولًا جذريًا في هذا القطاع الحيوي، مع انطلاق رؤية السعودية 2030 التي جعلت من تطوير الرياضة أولوية استراتيجية لتحسين جودة الحياة، وتعزيز حضور المملكة على الساحة الرياضية الإقليمية والدولية.
– 25/4/2025

وبناء منظومة احترافية لرعاية الموهوبين، مما يجعل من السعودية لاعبًا محوريًا في صناعة الرياضة إقليميًا وعالميًا.
8/3/2025

To sum up, AA's reporting after 2016 shifted dramatically, presupposing women's participation as normalized and celebrated. Articles highlighted achievements in local and international tournaments, portraying women as active contributors to national progress. Presuppositions here functioned to naturalize reform: rather than debating whether women should participate, coverage assumed their involvement as a given and emphasized its alignment with Vision 2030's modernization agenda.

The contrast between AJ and AA illustrates how presupposition strategies serve as ideological tools. AJ's pre-2016 discourse reinforced restriction by presupposing exclusion as natural, while AA's post-2016 discourse legitimized reform by presupposing inclusion as inevitable. By 2025, both outlets had converged toward encouraging women's participation, reflecting the success of Vision 2030 in reshaping public discourse. This discursive evolution underscores the media's dual role: not only reflecting social change but actively constructing it. Presuppositions, by presenting contested realities as taken-for-granted truths, reveal the hidden ideological work behind Saudi Arabia's transformation.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Saudi media discourses, particularly those of *Al-Jazirah* (AJ) and *Al-Arabia* (AA), have undergone a profound transformation in their representation of Saudi women's participation in sports. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with a focus on presupposition strategies, the research revealed how language functions as a subtle yet powerful tool in shaping public perception and legitimizing social change. Prior to the launch of Vision 2030, AJ's coverage presupposed women's involvement in sports as restricted, contested, and marginal. Women were often portrayed as subjects of debate between conservative and reformist voices, with their participation framed as exceptional or problematic. In contrast, post-2016 discourses shifted toward normalization and

encouragement, with presuppositions increasingly constructed around women's achievements, health benefits, and contributions to national progress.

By 2025, the discursive landscape reflects a striking ideological realignment: Saudi women are no longer positioned as outsiders to sports but as active participants and symbols of modernization. This shift illustrates how presupposition strategies can naturalize new realities, embedding reformist ideologies into everyday discourse. The findings underscore the role of media not merely as a mirror of social change but as an active agent in producing and sustaining new cultural narratives.

The implications of this study extend beyond Saudi Arabia. They highlight the importance of examining media discourse as a site of ideological negotiation, where presuppositions function to normalize contested practices and values. For scholars of discourse, gender, and Middle Eastern studies, this research demonstrates how linguistic strategies can reveal the hidden power struggles behind social transformation. For policymakers and advocates, it shows that media framing is central to the success of reform agendas, as it shapes public acceptance and collective identity.

Ultimately, the transformation in Saudi women's sporting representation under Vision 2030 reflects a broader reconfiguration of gender roles in the Kingdom. It signals a move from restriction to empowerment, from invisibility to visibility, and from marginalization to centrality in national development. Future research could expand this analysis by comparing Saudi media discourses with international coverage, or by exploring how presupposition strategies intersect with other linguistic devices such as metaphor, modality, and intertextuality. Such work would deepen our understanding of how language mediates the complex interplay between tradition, reform, and globalization in contemporary Saudi society.

Acknowledgment

The completion of this study could not have been possible without significant contribution and support from the University of Birmingham, UK, The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, The Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), our parents, families and friends. Without them, any of this would indeed be possible.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

References

- Al-Sudairy, H. T. (2017). *Modern woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Rights, challenges and achievements*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Al-Rasheed, M. (2013). *A most masculine state: Gender, politics and religion in Saudi Arabia* (No. 43). Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, P. (2006). *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Baker, P. (2008). *Sexed texts: Language, gender and sexuality*. London: Equinox.
- Baker, P. (2010b). Representations of Islam in British broadsheet and tabloid newspapers
- Baker, P., & McEnery, T. (2005). A corpus-based approach to discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in UN and newspaper texts. *Language and Politics*, 4(2), 197-226.
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., & McEnery, T. (2013 forthcoming). *Discourse Analysis and Media Bias: The Representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., Majid Khosravi, Nik, Krzyzanowski, M., McEnery, T., & Wodak, R. (2008). *A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press*. *Discourse & Society*, 19(3),273-306.
- Baker, P., Hardie, A., & McEnery, T. (2006). *A Glossary of Corpus Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bednarek, M. (2006) *Evaluation in Media Discourse: Analysis of a Newspaper Corpus*. London: Continuum.
- Bell, A. and Garrett, P. (eds.) (1998) *Approaches to Media Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Breen, J. M. (2007) "Mass media and new media technologies". In E. Devereux (ed.) *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates*. London: Sage.
- Brekle, H. (1989) "War with words". In R. Wodak (ed.) *Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Carter, C., & Steiner, L. (2004b). Introduction to *Critical Readings: Media and Gender*. In C. Chilton, P. (2005). Missing Links in Mainstream CDA: Modules, Blends and the Critical.
- Chilton, P., & Schaffner, C. (2002). Introduction: Themes and principles in the analysis of political discourse In P. Chilton & C. Schaffner (Eds.), *Politics as Text and Talk: Analytic Approaches to Political Discourse* (pp. 1-41). Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in Late Modernity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Edward Arnold. (1985). Introduction to Functional Grammar, London.
- Elyas, T., Al-Zhrani, K. A., Mujaddadi, A., & Almohammadi, A. (2020). The representation (s) of Saudi women pre-driving era in local newspapers and magazines: a critical discourse analysis. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1-20.
- Fairclough, N. (1988). Discourse representation in media discourse. *Sociolinguistics*, 17, 125-139.
- Fairclough, N. (1989/2001). *Language and Power* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995a) *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1995b) *Media Discourse*. London: Arnold.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power*. Second Edition. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2003) *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis of Social Research*. London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. and Wodak, R. (1997) "Critical discourse analysis". In T. van Dijk (ed.) *Discourse as Social Interaction Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction. Volume 2*. London: Sage.
- Farah Nadia Harun et al., 'The Driving Restriction on Saudi Women: Critical Analysis of Modality in Arabic Online News Discourse', *Journal of Fatwa Management and Research* (2018): 466–87.
- Fowler, R. (1991) *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London: Routledge
- Fowler, R. (1996b) "On critical linguistics". In C.R. Caldas-Coulthard and M. Coulthard (eds.) *Texts and Practices. Reading in Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge. Ge.
- Halliday, M. A. K. and Hasan, R. (1986) *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1970). Functional Diversity in Language, as seen from a Consideration of Modality and Mood in English. In: *Foundations of Language* 6, 322-361.
- Ibn Baz, Abdullah. (1991). *Hukm al-Mar'ah wa al-Riyadhah (Fatwa on Women and Sports)*. <https://binbaz.org.sa/old/31231>. 15th August 2018.

- Ismail, M., Harun, F., Daoudi, A. (2018). Naming Strategies in Modern Standard Arabic Online News Discourse: The Case of Al-Jazeera And BBC Coverage on the 2011 Tunisian Jasmine Revolution in *Journal of Global Business and Social Entrepreneurship* (GBSE) Vol. 4: No. 11 (May 2018) page 158-171.
- Muhammad Tahir, 'A Critical Discourse Analysis of Religious Othering of Muslims in the Washington Post', *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research* 14, no. 6 (2013): 744–53.
- P. Chilton & R. Wodak. (Eds.), *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, Methodology and Interdisciplinarity* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Palmer, F.R. (1986). *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Perkins, M.R., (1983). *Modal Expressions in English*. London: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Reisigl, M and Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetoric of Racism and Antisemitism*. London: Routledge.
- Richardson, J. (2007). *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Talmon, R. (1999). The Syntactic Category *maf<u:l mutlaq*. In: Suleiman, Y. (ed): *Arabic Grammar and Linguistics*. UK: Curzon Press.
- Taher, E. A. T. (2019). *Female visibility/representation in Saudi Arabia: a critical multimodal/discourse analysis of the 2013 IKEA catalogue and press discourses on Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral dissertation, Newcastle University).
- Tariq Elyas and Abdulrahman S. AlJabri 'Representations of Western Newspapers on Saudi Male's Guardianship System & Women's Freedom to Travel: A Critical Discourse Analysis', *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 7, no. 3 (2020): 1–24.
- Tariq Elyas and Najwa Ali Al-Zahrani, 'A Critical Discourse Analysis of Saudi Okaz Newspaper Front-Page Headlines: A Case Study', *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 12, no. 1 (2019): 3–20.
- Sajad Kabgani, 'The representation of Muslim women in non-Islamic media: A critical discourse analysis study on Guardian', *International Journal of Women's Research* 2, no. 1 (2013):57–78.
- Safyah Alshakhs, 'The Evaluation of Saudi Women's status Through a Media Lens', (Master thesis, University of Nebraska, Omaha, 2012).
- Wodak, R and Chilton, P. (eds.) (2005) *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Wodak, R. (2001) "What CDA is about - a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments". In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (eds.) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis: Introducing Qualitative Methods*. London: Sage.
- Wodak, R. (ed.) (1989) *Language, Power and Ideology. Studies in Political Discourse*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (eds.) (2001) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis: Introducing Qualitative Methods*. London: Sage.