

Technology Disruption in Amendments of Regulations for Women Travel Permits in Saudi Arabia

Beatrix Marcella Lourdes Imelda Boro¹, Hesti Nurani², Andriko Sandria³

International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Sebelas Maret.

¹ beatriximelda@student.uns.ac.id

² hesti.nurani@student.uns.ac.id

³ andrikosandria.ma@staff.uns.ac.id

Abstract

The Women Travel Permit feature on the Absher mobile application launched by the Saudi Arabian government was in the spotlight of various international media in early 2019 until the developer finally removed the feature. This paper will describe the process of changing norms in Saudi Arabia that made the government amend regulations on women's travel there. The approach used in this paper is the constructivism approach by adopting the concept of a gender equality regime presented by Nüket Kardam. Data from various media publications about the discourse around foreign travel permits for women in Saudi Arabia is the main source as a contextual explanation to describe the interaction between norms of global gender equality with norms in force in Saudi Arabia. The results of this study indicated that the feature of a women's travel permit on the Absher application triggers the reaction of several international actors due to several related cases reported. The reaction of one US senator Ron Wyden's in the media was the beginning of the emergence of international reactions to the living conditions of women in Saudi Arabia. Various local and international actors are triggered to sue the government in line with the increasing pressure from the international world. This paper concludes that Absher Application triggered the pressure from international actors who want the adoption of the norms of global gender equality so that it can influence the Saudi Arabian government in amending regulations and eliminating the features of women travel permits in the Absher application.

Keywords: Absher, Gender, Regimes, Women Travel Permit, Saudi Arabia,

Introduction

In 2013 under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior in collaboration with the National Information Center of Saudi Arabia launched an e-government product called Absher (Sabq.org, 2014). Absher means "your request will be fulfilled", in accordance with its purpose which is to meet the needs of the citizens of Saudi Arabia related to matters with the interior ministry (Human Right Watch, 2019). Through this program, administrative procedures related to the interests of Saudi Arabians in the interior ministry shifted from those originally using printed paper to electronic media

via the internet. The public is also not required to come to the ministry office to take care of passports and visas because electronic machine services have been provided in public places. Some of the features contained in it include Query of performing the Hajj, health insurance, new workers and visitors, The issuance of travel permits and canceled, The issuance of visas and canceled, and so on (Al-Khateeb, 2015).

The government continues to develop Absher's programs and services to be more efficient in use and easily accessible to the community. One of the innovations made by the government is

by releasing the Absher application as an Individual e-Service Mobile Application on February 24, 2016 on Google Play and iTunes services. The government also provides several additional features on the Absher Application, for example renewal of driver's license, passport control, exit, entry visas for expatriates. The launch of this application received a positive response from citizens of Saudi Arabia, in addition to its access to public services that are increasingly easy as well as a more complete variation of features. As of 2019, the Absher application has been used by more than eleven million users (AlJazeera, 2019).

Even though the Absher app received a lot of appreciation, criticism from the domestic and international community were still conveyed through social media, namely Twitter. Most of the criticisms raised protested against the Women Travel Permit feature, which is a feature that facilitates the licensing of Saudi Arabian women to travel abroad. Permission was obtained from male guardians, so that every departure of Saudi Arabian women can be known by the guardian. The male guardian will receive an SMS regarding the licensing confirmation and departure information.

The first Tweet that criticized Absher came from the @CarlMarsalis

account on February 2, 2019 through the hashtag Absher (#Absher). This account writes: **“Men in #SaudiArabia can track their wives and daughters using the government #Masssurveillance programme #Absher. If we try to escape this slavery society and are not proficient enough at #CyberWar to evade its tracking your own family will likely kill you.”** This Tweet is accompanied by an English news link bussinesinsider.com, which is a media from United State which reports about Shahad al-Muhaimeed and Rahaf al-Qunun, Saudi women, who are trying to escape abroad. In this news, it was conveyed that the Absher application is a barrier for Saudi Arabian women to seek asylum in other countries (Businessinsider, 2019).

Criticism was also expressed by the @AsunCarterro account on 3 February 2019 through #Absher. The account shares news from the Spanish-language media Publico.es entitled **“‘#Absher’: la aplicación móvil del Gobierno saudí para rastrear a las #mujeres y evitar que escapenvía @publico_es”** (Absher ': Government-Owned Mobile Application Saudis Used to Track Women and Prevent Them (to) Escape) (Publico.es, 2019). On the same date, the @infosKDK and @kkerima

accounts reposted similar news from the French-language media, Slate.fr (Slate.fr, 2019). The account @infosKDK writes: **"#arabesaoudite #applications En partenariat avec le gouvernement, l'appli #Absher permet aux pères et maris d'empêcher leurs femmes et leurs filles de quitter le pays."** government, #Absher application allows fathers and husbands to prevent their wives and daughters from leaving the country). While the account @kkerima wrote: **"L'égalité homme-femme selon 1 '#ArabieSaoudite. L'application #Absher pour empêcher sa fille or femme de quitter le pays. Bravo "@ONU_fr ce pays mérite vraiment sa place au conseil des droits de l'homme":** (Gender equality according to #ArabieSaoudite. #Absher application used to prevent daughters and wives from leaving the country. Bravo ...)

Criticism delivered by the international community is accompanied by demands on Apple and Google to remove the Absher application from the app store service. This demand began to be massive called after the American senate, Ron Wyden, delivered a letter to Google and Apple on February 11, 2019 which contained a request to remove the Absher application from their services because it violated human rights (Wyden,

2019). Ron Wyden also reiterated his claim in a Twitter post, on February 13, 2019, which contained: **"I am demanding that @ Google and @ Apple pull down apps that promote abusive practices against women in Saudi Arabia."** by the international community, one of which was delivered by the English-language Twitter account @LeilZahra on February 13, 2019, which wrote: bThis Tweet also includes an insider.com media link which contains criticisms from various activists about Google and Apple. They argue that Absher is an application that curbs women's movements and preserves patriarchal culture, so that Apple and Google, which are made in western products, should not support that culture by providing Absher applications in the app store(Businessinsider, 2019).

Existing discourse not only occurs abroad, in the domestic environment there are also pros and cons that are more directed to the regulations of women travel permits. For example the Twitter account @ _H_2015 which supports the rules of a women's travel permit by writing:

"هههههه سفر من غير محرم تعرفين كم وحده تسافر بدون محرم؟؟ الالاف النساء الي حاصلين ع تصريح يسافرن بغير محرم يامغفله"

(Hahaha Traveling without a mahram. Do you know how many women travel alone without a mahram? Thousands of women who have permission to travel without a mahram are lost). In addition to rejection, there is also support from domestic people who want to abolish the rules for women travel permits as stated in the Arabic language account @ samiaalnasser on April 11, 2018, which writes:

"اتمني من ولاة الأمر حفظهم الله إعادة النظر في موضوع سفر المرأة وعدم إلزامها بتصريح إذن خروج للسفر خاصة إذا كانت المرأة مدركة وواعية هي التي تتحمل مسئولية نفسها ولما تعانيه بعض النساء لإضطهاد إما من أخوها أو من يعولها في حالة فقدها لأبيها ليسمح لها بالسفر"

(I hope that God will protect the Governors to reconsider travel rules that require women to have travel permits, especially if the woman is an adult woman who can be responsible for herself...)

In response to various criticisms from the international community towards Absher and domestic people's criticism of the rules for women travel permits, the Government of Saudi Arabia decided to amend the regulations governing Women Travel Permits. Changes to the regulation, announced on August 1, 2019, allow women over the age of 21 to obtain a passport and be able

to travel abroad without their guardian. The amendment also has an impact on the removal of the Women Travel Permit feature on the Absher application (The Guardian, 2019).

Methods

The concept of gender equality is used as the main concept to explain how the process of regulatory changes in Saudi Arabia related to the Women Travel Permit in the Absher application feature. Nüket Kardam in his article explained that gender equality has become an emerging regime with the spread of norms, principles, legal instruments and legal compliance globally. Kardam argues that the constructivist approach to international relations makes it possible to analyze how gender equality regimes work with a focus on influential norms, interactions between those norms and decision makers who are able to formally implement these norms. Kardam argued that the norms of global gender equality in Islamic countries shifted due to the interrelation with different norms carried by different institutions in the country. When the norms of global gender equality are introduced, trying to be integrated and mixed with existing norms, new norms will function and also replace the old norms. This also applies

in other developing countries where different institutions carry different gender norms. (Kardam, 2004)

Kardam's explanation of how the gender equality regime can influence decision making is the main approach to explore how the process of eliminating the women travel permit feature from the Absher application. The original norms formulated in the guardian law regulations in Saudi Arabia interact with the values and norms of global gender equality so as to influence decision makers to consider changing regulations related to Women Travel Permit. The data in this study were collected through the reporting and publication of research showing the norms and conditions of life of the people governed by the government of Saudi Arabia. The discourse search for Women Travel Permit features in Saudi Arabia will focus on the Absher application that has appeared in international media since early 2019. Various relevant institutions from the international, regional and domestic world as well as individuals are the actors analyzed in this paper.

Result and Discussion

Male Guardianship is one of the aspects included in Saudi Arabia's Basic Law. This basic law was officially adopted in 1992 by emphasizing that

Saudi Arabia as a sovereign country in its implementation was sourced from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Saudi Arabia Royal Order, 1992). The existence of male guardianship law prevents Saudi women from accessing tertiary education, working, obtaining passports, using public facilities and traveling abroad without the consent of the trustees. This rule directly puts women as a minor figure in the social life of society because all control is held by men.

Saudi Arabia which implements Islamic law as its constitution tends to be authoritarian in formulating every policy. Many rules ultimately discriminate against women because of the full application of Islamic law without looking at the context today. One of them was the ratification of the Law of Association by the Council of Ministers in 2015, which contained the rules regarding associations. The Law of Association is considered to be intolerant of human rights issues because in the rules listed there are no regulations regarding human rights (Amnesty International, 2018). One of the rules which is quite highlighted by human rights activists is the refusal of granting licenses to new organizations and the disbanding of existing organizations.

This regulation certainly creates conflict because in Saudi Arabia there are still many organizations engaged in the field of human rights that have not yet received a license.

In Saudi Arabia, there are only two human rights organizations, namely the Squid Human Rights Commission and the National Society for Human Rights (Amnesty International, 2018). Unfortunately both of these organizations are government-owned organizations, which are directly less effective in voicing public criticism to the government. Evidenced by the lack of action taken by both organizations to get involved in fighting for the human rights of the people of Saudi Arabia. This condition shows the need for international organizations to get involved in voicing the realization of human rights, especially gender equality. International organizations as entities outside the country have a wider movement space than the domestic community in Saudi Arabia itself. In addition to being restrained by culture in the domestic community, they are also confronted with laws set by the government, which is the reason why not many Saudi Arabians have massively expressed their rejection of the male guardianship law. The international

organizations that are quite active in Saudi Arabia are Human Right Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International.

Regarding the issue of male guardianship law, Human Right Watch sent a letter to the Ministry of the Interior on May 16, 2016 which contained a request for a meeting to discuss reports of findings on human rights in Saudi Arabia before being published (Human Rights Watch, 2017). HRW plans to discuss about women travel permits by bringing up the issue of the number of passport and overseas travel applications by women without permission from the male guardian, the number of requests to go abroad on the grounds of domestic violence and formal guidelines for women travel permits. Unfortunately the letter delivered by HRW did not get a response from the government until the day the report was published. This action shows how the government of Saudi Arabia does not have a high commitment in dealing with human rights issues, especially women travel permits.

A women's travel permit is a rule that requires women to obtain permission from a male guardian related to the need to travel abroad. Women cannot apply for a passport and travel abroad without permission from the male guardian. Although a woman already has a

passport, but to be able to go abroad must bring a written letter from her guardian. Here the male guardian not only gives permission but can also determine how long the woman he is responsible for can go abroad. The launch of the Absher application in 2016 in fact changed the licensing requirements that previously had to be written to be mobile. Even with the SMS facility, it makes it easier for male guardians to supervise the women they are responsible for. Because the Absher application has many features that greatly help the people of Saudi Arabia, few of the Saudi Arabian domestic communities criticize the Absher application. The public understands that what needs to be campaigned for is rejection of regulations regarding women travel permits, not about Absher applications.

Continuation of the lack of response from the government regarding the letter sent by HRW was the publication of a report entitled "Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System" on July 17, 2016. This report contains the ins and outs of the male guardianship system, restricting freedom of movement, violence against women, and women inequality. HRW also includes stories of Saudi Arabian women who have been living under male

guardianship law (Human Rights Watch, 2017). From the data presented there are indications that women in Saudi Arabia do not have freedom in carrying out activities and enjoying public services. The existence of a male guardian cannot guarantee that what he decides will have a good effect on the woman. For certain cases, male guardianship law is actually misused by men to act arbitrarily towards women. With the publication of the results of this report made the people of Saudi Arabia and the international community begin to realize and understand how Saudi Arabian women are treated unfairly under the male guardianship law system.

The publication of the report from HRW had a great impact on the emergence of campaigns that rejected male guardianship law. One of these campaigns appeared on Twitter social media using the hashtag **#سعوديات_نطلب_اسقاط_الولاية**

(#TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship)

on July 17, 2016. One criticism was delivered by @WenzelWichalski account which is an activist of human rights in Germany, writing **“Violence against women must be punished, not facilitated.**

#Saudi #TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship”.

This hashtag eventually became trending

in several countries, especially countries in the Middle East that have similar rules. The demand of this campaign is to ask the government to end the male guardianship law system in Saudi Arabia. Activists assume that women of legal age have the right to make decisions and take responsibility for themselves. In Saudi Arabia, women are treated like a child who needs his guardian's support and approval to carry out an activity.

Another hashtag that was also used to mobilize a campaign of criticism against male guardianship law is **#أنا_ولية_أمري** (**#IAMMyOwnGuardian**). This hashtag was first used by the **@MsSaffaa** Twitter account on October 13, 2012, but has not yet attracted many supporters. Only after HRW published its report, the public both domestically and internationally began to use this hashtag to express support for the elimination of male guardianship law. One criticism of using this hashtag is criticism from Saffaa on September 5, 2016 who said, **"It's unbelievable that #saudi women r (are) treated as minors forever. #togethertoendmaleguardianship #iammyownguardian"**. Even this hashtag continues to be used today for now shows protest against male guardianship law issues that have never been resolved.

The hashtags used in Twitter social media have proven to be able to mobilize the movements of domestic and international communities to find common mission. Through social media Twitter, activists can spread information and gather support to enter the next stage of the social movement, namely the petition. On September 26, 2016, a petition was filed demanding the elimination of male guardianship law to the Royal Court, after it was signed by 14,700 people, both men and women (The Arab Daily , 2016). This petition is a follow-up to the **#IamMyOwnGuardianship** and **#TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship** campaigns that are rife on Twitter, showing positive trends in favor of Saudi Arabian women. The petition delivered by Aziza al-Yousef, in the end did not get a response from the Royal Court and instead activists received criminal sanctions because this action was considered a crime against Islam and its continued threat to the Saudi community. This fact has increasingly drawn criticism and protests that continue into the following years.

After a long journey, the government of Saudi Arabia abolished the rules regarding the requirement for permission from male guardians for

women who want to access government services, except for certain regulations on April 17, 2017. But after 3 months of review period, the government actually tightened the rules in other fields namely the need for permission for women to go abroad, get a passport and get married. One of the rules highlighted by Saudi Arabian domestic society is about permission to travel abroad, this rule is considered to violate the women's freedom movement. In The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state ... [and] to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (Human Rights Watch , 2017). Women travel permit rules clearly contradict this rule because women must obtain permission from their guardian if they want to go abroad.

Criticism and protests that have led to the regulation of women travel permits are still dominated by the domestic community. While the international community tends to criticize male guardianship law related to driving access for women. The role of the international community is very large in social movements in Saudi Arabia. Although it cannot be a definite benchmark in seeing the influence of the

international community on government policy, it can more or less be considered by a decision maker. One of the demands that was finally fulfilled was that women's right to drive was legalized. This demand also went through a long process, considering the law in force in Saudi Arabia is Islamic law. So as to become a complete social movement it is better to be supported by the international community whose position is not bound by a particular country.

After the success of the demand for driving rights, activists and the domestic community increasingly intensified their campaign to abolish the rules for women travel permits. However, because it was not supported by the international community, this campaign did not emerge as an important agenda for the government of Saudi Arabia. Until finally in May 2018, the government of Saudi Arabia began to crack down on human rights activists because it was considered to be against religious rules and disturbing the stability of the country. Some activists such as Loujain al Hathloul, Eman al Nafjan, and Azizah al Yusuf were eventually sentenced to prison for campaigning against the rejection of rules that prohibit women from driving and demanding the elimination of guardianship law

(Amnesty International, 2018). This government action was used to stop the criticism and public protest against the government of Saudi Arabia. Opportunities for the public to express criticism of the rules of guardianship or especially women's travel permits are getting smaller because of the threat from the government. However, this does not apply to the international community which continues to massively voice the rejection of guardianship law through social media, although it has not specifically addressed the issue of women travel permits.

The rules regarding women travel permits imposed in Saudi Arabia not only restrict Saudi women from traveling, going to school and working abroad, but also prevent women from seeking asylum in other countries. During this time many Saudi women have experienced both physical and mental violence caused by the rules of guardianship law. According to Human Right Watch data, almost 35% of Saudi women have experienced violence committed by their guardians (Human Rights Watch , 2017). Women as victims cannot report cases of violence experienced because the rules of guardianship law are often used as a reason for men to commit violence. The existence of male guardianship law is

considered to facilitate violence, especially in families.

One case of seeking asylum due to violence is a case that occurred with Rahaf Mohammed, a Saudi Arabian woman who fled to Thailand on January 5, 2019. Rahaf uses social media Twitter to seek support and protection from other countries. On January 7, 2019, through his Twitter account, @ rahaf84427714, he wrote: **"I seek protection in particular from the following country Canada / United States / Australia / United kingdom, I ask any if it Representatives to contact me."** Support began to emerge from the international community by using the hashtag #SaveRahaf with the aim of urging countries and international organizations to provide protection for Rahaf.

In addition to the international community which individually provided support to Rahaf, many international online media also reported on the case including Independent news media, BBC, The Guardian, AlJazeera, The Irish Times, and others. These media also played a role in bringing the Rahaf case to international scope. In reporting on this case, the media criticized the women's travel permit which prevented Saudi women, as victims of male

guardianship law, from seeking asylum abroad. This case eventually triggered the entry of the international community to be involved in the campaign against women's travel permits.

In contrast to the above media which emphasizes women's travel permits, Businessinsider media instead highlights the Absher application as an application used to track the whereabouts of women. In a story titled "Saudi Arabia Runs a Huge, Sinister Online Database of Women that Use Men to Track Them and Stop Them from Running Away", it was mentioned that Absher's service prevented Rahaf from escaping Saudi Arabia (BusinessInsider, 2019). Through the Absher application, the male guardian and the government can determine whether or not Rahaf can go abroad, this is the reason why he went to seek asylum after being in Turkey, because the Absher system is not affiliated with the immigration agencies of other countries.

Changes in Movement After the News about the Emergence of the Absher

After news about the Absher application published by international media Businessinsider appeared and became a hot discussion on Twitter social media, many international communities

condemned Absher. The news stole the attention of many people, especially from the international community, who are concerned about the application which is considered to support practices that suppress women's freedom in Saudi Arabia. Criticism that developed on Twitter social media was accompanied by a viral hashtag Absher (#Absher). Interestingly, the hashtag is not only used by the international community to criticize abs her applications, but also to be used by domestic people who were previously more inclined to use the hashtag أبشر (Absher; in Arabic), to express their support for abs her applications. For example, the account @salah500007483 on March 3, 2019, which wrote:

“عاجل شركة #قوقل بعد الحملة الفاشلة : لن نحذف تطبيق #أبشر كونه غير مخالف ، ونحن نقف مع الاستخدام الذكي للتقنية #السعودية” #قوقل #Google #أبشر #Absher #افضل_تطبيق_ابشر #وزارة_الداخلية”

(Parties who press #Google after a failed campaign: we will not remove the #Absher application because it does not violate existing conditions, we support the use of #Google #Absher #Google #Best_Appsher #MinistryofInterior)

The existence of a discourse on Twitter that supports or rejects the application by using #Absher, makes

information about the absher progress and becomes a concern of various groups, ranging from human rights activists to the United States politician, Ron Wyden. Ron Wyden is a senior senate who represents the state of Oregon, United States of America and has a concern for human rights. He was the first US politician to criticize Absher. However, in contrast to the international community who criticized the existence of absher applications that perpetuate a patriarchal culture in Saudi Arabia, Wyden paid attention to the giant technology companies, Google and Apple that provide these applications in Google Store and Itunes services that can be downloaded easily by various parties. Wyden argues that 'western' technology companies that should uphold democracy and human rights fully, should not act as if they support violations of women's freedom of rights in Saudi Arabia and say that "the Saudi Arabian system that controls women is a terrible thing" (Insider, 2019). Wyden sued Google and Apple to remove the Absher application in their service by sending a letter to Apple's chief executive officers and Google, Tim Cook and Sundar Pichai on 11 February 2019 (United States Senate, 2019). Wyden's demand was finally responded to by

Cook on February 12, 2019 in his interview with National Public Radio. Cook stated that he had not heard of the case and planned to investigate possible violations. When Cook appeared to be trying to avoid further questions, Google still had not yet responded to the case (Businessinsider, 2019). On February 13, 2019, Wyden reiterated his demands on Apple and Google in his Twitter post. This post got 636 likes and was re-tweeted 298 times. Wyden's post initiated the emergence of demands from the international community who also questioned and criticized Google and Apple.

Apart from the international community, demands sent by letter to Apple and Google were also delivered by 14 members of the United States congress, including Ilhan Omar, Member of the State of Minnesota, Yvette D. Clarke, Member of Congress from New York, and Jackie Speier , Member of Congress representing the state of California, on February 21, 2019. They demanded that Google and Apple's investigation of the Absher application be published and refer to the two big companies as "accomplices in oppression," in the letter they also stated that "Twenty first century innovations should not perpetuate sixteenth century

tyranny. "The letter also comes with a time limit for apple and google companies to respond to these demands until February 28, 2019 (Congress of the United States, 2019). But unfortunately, no further response from Google or Apple. (Insider, 2019)

Critics of Google and Apple who provided the Absher application in their service were also conveyed by Maha and Wafa Al-Subaie, a former Saudi citizen who is currently a Georgian national. They argue that technology companies (Google and Apple) will help bring about change if they pull the Absher application from its service. As Wafa said, "If [they] remove this application, maybe the government will do something," (The Guardian, 2019). This statement received a response from the international community on Twitter who also criticized Google and Absher, such as the @MRaymondonIR account on April 25, 2019 which wrote:

“Saudi Sisters Urge Google and Apple to Pull Inhuman Woman-Tracking App @ Google and anyone else facilitating the distribution of the #Absher app should be hammed. #techabuse research shows #humanrights effects @ leotanczt @UCLSTeAPP "This tweet is also accompanied by a time.com news link

that reports on the Case of Maha and Wafa Al Subaie and his criticism of Apple and Google. Maha and Wafa Al-Subaie themselves are two brothers who fled from Saudi Arabia in April 2019 by stealing a cellphone and using their father's Absher account to buy plane tickets to Turkey and give permission to travel without a guardian, with the main goal of the state of Georgia. The country of Georgia was chosen because it does not require a visa for citizens of Saudi Arabia to live there.

With the case of Maha and Wafa Al-Subaie, campaigns which have voiced criticism of the Absher application on Twitter social media have been massively encouraged. The number of discourses that have emerged and also pressure from the international community since the beginning of 2019, forced the government to consider abolishing the rules for women travel permits. Previously, men under 21 years of age and women of all ages were required to get permission from their guardians to travel abroad. But on August 1, 2019 the government passed an amendment to the royal decree, one of which allowed Saudi Arabian women to get a passport without the approval of their male guardians. One of the amended rules is Royal Decree M / 24 article 2 which states that passports can

only be issued to Saudi male applicants who are replaced with Royal Decree M / 134 which says "[a] passport may be granted to anyone who has Saudi citizenship. "With this new regulation, Saudi Arabian women are no longer required to travel together with their male guardians (Library of Congress, 2019). The government also abolished the features of the women's travel permit in the absher application service. This step is considered to be able to bring changes in efforts to eliminate gender discrimination in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

Campaigns that have arisen to criticize gender discrimination in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the Guardianship Law, began with movements originating from domestic communities. However, the movement has not been able to put pressure on the government because there is no participation and interference from international actors. Here the media has a big role to internationalize cases related to Women Travel Permit so that it can be known and become a concern of the international community. The movement aimed at criticizing and demanding the abolition of women travel permits faces

several major obstacles such as differences in norms from Islamic law with international gender regimes. The fact that gender equality issues have not been included in the agenda of the Saudi Arabian government is also a reason for the difficulty in demanding the elimination of women's permits.

Demands regarding the abolition of Women Travel Permit regulations began to become a concern and agenda of the government since the news of the absher application which was considered to perpetuate patriarchal culture became viral on Twitter social media. This news received a lot of attention and sympathy from the international community and even US politicians. They demand the abolition of the Absher application and want the adoption of the norms of global gender equality. The massive discourse and international criticism on Twitter's social media can finally influence the Saudi Arabian government in amending regulations on the elimination of the women's travel permit feature on the Absher application. The amendment is expected to bring a better change to the lives of Saudi Arabian women.

References

- AlJazeera. (2019, February 13). *Apple, Google Urged to Remove App that Lets Saudi Men Track Wives*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/apple-google-urged-remove-app-lets-saudi-men-track-wives-190213082939373.html>
- Al-Khateeb, A. d. (2015). E-Government Strategy and its impact on Economic Development of the Nation: A Case Study of the KSA. *International Advanced Research Journal in Science, Engineering and Technology*, 105-110.
- Amnesty International. (2018, November). *Saudi Arabia: Reform Without Human Rights*. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/8673/2018/en/>
- Businessinsider. (2019). *Apple and Google accused of helping 'enforce gender apartheid' by hosting Saudi government app that tracks women and stops them leaving the country*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/apple-google-criticised-for-saudi-government-app-activists-say-fuel-discrimination-2019-2?IR=T>
- Businessinsider. (2019, February 13). *Apple CEO Tim Cook promises to investigate the Saudi app branded 'abhorrent' for allowing men to track women*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.sg/apple-ceo-tim-cook-pledges-to-investiagte-saudi-app-absher-2019-2/?r=US&IR=T>
- Businessinsider. (2019). *Saudi Arabia runs a huge, sinister online database of women that men use to track them and stop them from running away*.
- BusinessInsider. (2019, February 4). *Saudi Arabia runs a huge, sinister online database of women that men use to track them and stop them from running away*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/absher-saudi-website-men-control-women-stop-escape-2019-1>
- Congress of The United States. (2019, February 21). Retrieved from https://speier.house.gov/sites/speier.house.gov/files/2019_02_21%20Letter%20to%20Google%20and%20Apple.pdf

Human Right Watch. (2019, May 6). *Saudi Arabia's Absher App: Controlling Women's Travel While Offering Government Services*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/06/saudi-arabias-absher-app-controlling-womens-travel-while-offering-government>

Human Rights Watch . (2017, July 16). *Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system>

Insider. (2019, February 12). *A US Senator has demanded that Apple and Google remove a Saudi Arabian government app that allows men 'abhorrent' control over women's lives*. Retrieved from <https://www.insider.com/absher-senator-ron-wyden-demands-apple-google-remove-saudi-govt-app-2019-2>

Insider. (2019, February 8). *Apple and Google accused of helping 'enforce gender apartheid' by hosting Saudi government app that tracks women and stops them leaving the country*. Retrieved from <https://www.insider.com/absher-politicians-demand-apple-google-end-investigation-into-saudi-app-2019-2>

Library of Congress. (2019, August 23). *Saudi Arabia: Law on Passports Amended to Allow Women to Travel Abroad Without a Male Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/saudi-arabia-law-on-passports-amended-to-allow-women-to-travel-abroad-without-a-male-guardian/>

Publico.es. (2019, February 2). *'Absher': la aplicación móvil del Gobierno saudí para rastrear a las mujeres y evitar que escapen*. Retrieved from https://www.publico.es/sociedad/machismo-absher-aplicacion-movil-gobierno-saudi-rastrear-mujeres-evitar-escapen.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=web

Sabq.org. (2014, February 6). "الجوازات": "أبشر" أنجزت 3 ملايين عملية إلكترونية في شهرين ونصف . Retrieved from <https://sabq.org/m6Qfde>

Saudi Arabia Royal Order. (1992). *Basic Law of Governance*. Retrieved from <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/sa/sa016en.pdf&ved=2ahUKEw>

iD2bGSg4_1AhV58HMBHRvEBRYQFjACegQIARAB&usg=AOvVaw2b4BUe
N7dR-UF6m94toURa

Slate.fr. (2019, February 3). *En Arabie Saoudite, une application pour contrôler les déplacements des femmes*. Retrieved from <http://www.slate.fr/story/173073/en-arabie-saoudite-application-controle-femmes-liberte>

The Guardian. (2019, April 25). *Runaway Saudi sisters call on Google and Apple to pull 'inhuman' woman-monitoring app*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/25/runaway-saudi-sisters-call-for-inhuman-woman-monitoring-app-absher-to-be-pulled-google-apple?CMP=share_btn_tw

The Guardian. (2019, August 1). *Saudi Arabia allows women to travel without male guardian's approval*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/01/saudi-women-can-now-travel-without-a-male-guardian-reports-say>

Thw Arab Daily . (2016, October 2). *Saudi Women Challenge Male Guardianship Law*. Retrieved from https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/5696-womens-activism-in-saudi-arabia.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjSrfvvgY_1AhXpILcAHb4NDT8QFjABegQIAhAB&usg=AOvVaw0B_btmD2vkSqu6cz8FQ9ZW

United States Senate. (2019, February 11). Retrieved from <https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/021119%20Letter%20to%20Apple%20and%20Google%20on%20Saudi%20App.pdf>

Wyden. (2019, February 11). *letter to Google and Apple - Senator Ron Wyden - Senate.gov*. Retrieved from [wyden.senate.gov: https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/021119%20Letter%20to%20Apple%20and%20Google%20on%20Saudi%20App.pdf](https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/021119%20Letter%20to%20Apple%20and%20Google%20on%20Saudi%20App.pdf)