



**Empowerment Behind the Wheel: A Qualitative Study of Saudi Women as  
Ride-Hailing Service Drivers in Gig Work**

By

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A dissertation submitted to the Henley Business School in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Reading

October 2024

## **Declaration**

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Signed:

Date: 10/10/2024

## **Acknowledgements**

My utmost appreciation goes out to Allah (God), first and foremost, for His countless blessings and for providing me with the strength and resilience to bring this work to completion.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Professor Abby Ghobadian, for his unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my doctoral study. My heartfelt thanks also go to Dr Irina Heim, Dr Fabio Goncalves De Oliveira, and PGR Alex Baker for their invaluable support and contributions to this journey.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the Government of Saudi Arabia and King Abdulaziz University for the finest and most valuable scholarship I have ever received to pursue my studies at the University of Reading. Their support has been crucial to my academic journey.

To my beloved family—especially my parents, who have been my pillars of strength, and my brothers and sister—I owe a debt of gratitude that words can scarcely express. Mom and Dad, your love, prayers, and unwavering belief in me have been the foundation of this journey. I am eternally grateful for your sacrifices and constant support.

I am also deeply thankful to my wife, Maha Aloslani, for being my steadfast partner and source of strength. Her support, especially during the challenges of balancing our growing family with my studies, has been remarkable. Maha, your love and dedication have blessed our lives with two wonderful children, Azam and Rakan, who have been a source of joy throughout this journey.

Another person I owe a debt of gratitude to is Professor Zaki Alhasawy, my uncle, who has always encouraged me to follow in his footsteps and become a doctor.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the participants in this study. This study would have been unattainable without their eagerness and desire to share their experiences.

## **Note of Appreciation**

I express my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to Professor Kevin Money and Dr Ian Roper for their invaluable feedback and profound insights, which have significantly enriched the strength and quality of this thesis.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis and all my achievements to my parents, siblings, wife, and children, with heartfelt gratitude for their boundless support and enduring pride in me.

## Abstract

**Background:** This qualitative study explores the unprecedented emergence of Saudi women as drivers in ride-hailing services, marking a significant societal shift in a nation long characterised by conservative gender roles. While the gig economy has been widely examined in Western contexts, its intersection with gender in regions like Saudi Arabia (SA) remains underexplored. The rise of gig work, particularly in ride-hailing services, offers a unique lens through which to examine women's empowerment in non-traditional roles within a rapidly transforming society. This study addresses the gap in understanding how Saudi women navigate the gig economy through their experiences in providing ride-hailing services and the broader implications for gender roles and mobility in the Kingdom.

**Aims and Objectives:** The research investigates Saudi women's perspectives, attitudes, and motivations towards gig work within the male-dominated ride-hailing services, aiming to uncover how these women challenge traditional gender norms and navigate the pathways to empowerment in the public sphere.

**Methods:** Employing a single case study approach, which involves an in-depth examination of the experiences and perspectives of female gig drivers, this research is grounded in Biosocial Construction Theory, Indigenous Institutional Theory, and sociocultural perspectives to explore the intersection of gender, culture, and economic participation. Primary data was collected through comprehensive interviews with 26 individuals, including 22 female drivers from Saudi Arabia, two government officials, and two representatives from ride-hailing companies. Document analysis was also utilised to examine policies, regulations, and media coverage of women's participation in the ride-hailing services.

**Findings:** The study uncovers intricate narratives of agency, resistance, and negotiation, illustrating how Saudi women are actively challenging stereotypes, asserting autonomy, and

redefining gender norms. While Western women often work as drivers for financial independence, Saudi women leverage these roles for self-discovery, networking, and a culturally appropriate workspace (e.g., women driving women). However, their participation remains contingent upon familial approval and is constrained by stricter societal and regulatory restrictions, such as requirements for male guardians' consent, limitations on travel distances, and rigid working hours, reflecting limited autonomy and flexibility compared to Western peers. These efforts are tempered by persistent barriers such as social stigma, regulatory challenges, and safety concerns, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender equality in the public sphere.

**Contributions:** This study addresses a critical gap in the literature on Saudi female drivers who participate in gig work providing ride-hailing services by:

A) Theoretical Application: It significantly enriches the understanding of gender, culture, and economic participation in SA, emphasising the pivotal role of policy reforms and societal support in empowering women in gig work. It contributes to a more nuanced understanding of women's agency and empowerment within the evolving socio-political landscape of SA and underscores the importance of targeted interventions to foster inclusivity and address the systemic barriers faced by Saudi women in public and professional spheres. The application of Biosocial Construction Theory in this study adds a unique and innovative dimension by capturing the interplay between inherent gendered behaviours and societal expectations, offering a framework that can be adapted for future studies in similar contexts.

B) Policy Implications: It demonstrates how governmental support for gig work in SA, in contrast to many other nations, serves as a cornerstone for facilitating women's inclusion in the workforce. This finding provides a distinctive contribution to the academic discourse on gig economies globally, highlighting the potential of tailored government initiatives to drive

gender inclusivity and economic empowerment. It also offers policymakers insights into developing frameworks that balance cultural norms with progressive labour strategies.

C) Practical Implications: It provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, businesses, and gig platform operators. For policymakers, it advocates designing targeted programmes to address the specific needs and challenges faced by Saudi women in gig work, such as ensuring safety measures, equitable access to resources, and flexible working conditions. For businesses, it suggests fostering a supportive organisational culture that prioritises women's professional growth and autonomy. Ride-hailing platforms are encouraged to enhance operational policies to include training, mentorship opportunities, and incentives to retain female drivers while addressing systemic barriers. These practical implications aim to empower Saudi women economically and socially, contributing to Vision 2030's objectives of gender equality and workforce diversification.

**Keywords:** Saudi women, women empowerment, gig economy, ride-hailing services, gender roles



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## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
<b>SA</b>	Saudi Arabia
<b>SAr</b>	Saudi Arabian
<b>BCT</b>	Biosocial Construction Theory
<b>IIT</b>	Indigenous Institutional Theory
<b>MHRSD</b>	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development
<b>Hadaf</b>	Human Resources Development Fund
<b>TGA</b>	Transport General Authority
<b>FWC</b>	Future Work Company
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>CAQDAS</b>	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
<b>UoA</b>	Unit of Analysis
<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter offers a comprehensive introduction to the thesis, which centres on the examination of Saudi women's experiences in the gig work environment and their implications. The initial section delineates the background and significance of the research, encompassing a review of gig work and the motivations for this study, before addressing the rationale for selecting ride-hailing services over other gig work jobs. The second part then delineates the research aim, objectives and questions. Finally, the concluding section provides a detailed overview of the research methodology and the overall structure of the thesis.

## **1.1 Background and Significance of the Research**

Over the past decade, there has been a notable surge in the workforce participating in what is widely known as the 'gig economy' or 'online platform economy,' marked by the proliferation of new technology-driven forms of employment arrangements (Prassl, 2018). The emergence of digital gig economy platforms, facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT), has transformed the landscape of work worldwide (Hunt & Machingura, 2016). Recent developments in ICT have had a transformative impact on the gig economy, enabling faster, more efficient, and cost-effective service delivery (Manyika et al., 2016). These platforms serve as intermediaries connecting independent workers (often referred to as 'gig workers' or 'freelancers') with individuals or businesses seeking their services. By harnessing the power of algorithms and automation, digital platforms have reshaped the way services are accessed, purchased, and delivered in today's interconnected world. Companies such as Uber, Airtasker, Deliveroo, and others have developed digital platforms that connect service providers with consumers (Peetz, 2019). These companies have revolutionised their industries by providing convenient, efficient, and flexible services through digital platforms.

However, alongside these benefits, these companies have also faced criticism and scrutiny over various issues, including worker rights, labour conditions, and regulatory compliance. Multiple studies have noted the distinct obstacles and impediments that gig workers may have regarding the stability of their income, availability of benefits, job security, management of their talent, evaluations and assessments, periods of waiting without payment, emotional strain, and opportunities for professional growth (Granger et al., 2022; Doshi & Tikyani, 2020; Dey et al., 2022; Pichault & Naedenoen, 2022; Bates et al., 2021; Albornoz & Chávez, 2024). Notably, research has shown that women in particular often face additional barriers to participation in the gig economy, highlighting important challenges that must be addressed to advance gender equality and inclusiveness in the workforce (Lauren & Anandan, 2024; James, 2024; Agarwal et al., 2023; Palhad et al., 2023; Penu et al., 2023; Cropanzano et al., 2023; Mouazen & Hernández-Lara, 2023).

Investigating the countries from which gig workers originate and understanding the factors that shape supply structures in the global online gig economy is critical for comprehending broader labour market dynamics, the intricacies of economic globalisation, and the formulation of effective policies aimed at addressing social inequality and promoting global development (Ostoj, 2021). Recent literature highlights a notable trend of growing participation in app-based gig work across a diverse range of countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, India, China, Malaysia, Germany, the United States, and the Netherlands (De Ruyter & Rachmawati, 2020; Abkhezr & McMahon, 2024; Mehta, 2023; Abd Samad et al., 2023; Chang & Huang, 2023). Despite this global trend, there remains a significant gap in research specifically examining the experiences of Saudi workers within this context. This lack of focused study limits understanding of how local cultural, economic, and regulatory factors in Saudi Arabia (SA) might influence gig work participation and conditions, thereby presenting an important avenue for future research.

In the Saudi context, cultural norms, values, and attitudes towards work significantly shape individuals' motivations, preferences, and experiences as gig workers. Moreover, these experiences are further influenced by demographic characteristics such as gender, age, nationality, and educational attainment, which impact access to opportunities, working conditions, income levels, and overall well-being (Veldsman & van der Merwe, 2022; Liu et al., 2020; Wiener et al., 2023; Davidson et al., 2023). While the global growth of app-based gig work is undeniable, regional variations in the nature and extent of participation, as well as in the regulatory frameworks governing gig work, suggest that the gig economy is not monolithic. Consequently, examining regional disparities is crucial for comprehending gig workers' distinct challenges and opportunities across various global regions, particularly those in ride-hailing services (Rosenblat, 2018).

Thus, this study aims to address existing gaps in the literature by focusing on the unique Saudi context, where cultural, social, and economic factors profoundly influence the gig economy. In particular, the participation of Saudi female drivers in ride-hailing services offers a distinctive lens through which to understand these dynamics. This research explores how their involvement reflects broader shifts in societal norms and intersects with issues of gender, mobility, and economic opportunity. Gaining insights into these aspects is crucial for informing policies and practices that support the equitable integration of women into the workforce, particularly in rapidly evolving sectors like the gig economy.

The recent socio-cultural reforms in SA, notably lifting the driving ban for women, have significantly altered the landscape of mobility and transportation within the country (Krane & Majid, 2018). This shift has made ride-hailing services, such as Careem and Uber, an increasingly important mode of transport, especially given the limited availability and acceptance of public transport options (Al-Garawi & Kamargianni, 2022). Despite the growing relevance of these services, there remains a critical gap in understanding the specific factors

that influence their adoption and usage among Saudi women, who represent a newly empowered segment of the population regarding mobility (Qureshi & Shamim, 2023). Studying ride-hailing services in SA is thus essential to understanding how these services are being integrated into the daily lives of Saudi women and how they can be optimised to meet their needs better (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8). Moreover, exploring the experiences of Saudi women as drivers within these services can offer unique insights into the challenges and opportunities they face, which are shaped by the intersection of gender, culture, and technology. These insights are crucial for designing more effective and user-friendly transportation solutions that align with the unique socio-cultural context of SA. This research is fundamental as it contributes to the broader aims of Saudi Vision 2030, such as increasing the representation of women in the labour force and promoting sustainable economic development by diversifying the economy (Alghamdi et al., 2022).

## **1.2 Motivation for the Research**

Historically, the Saudi government prohibited women from working alongside men, endorsing a societal framework that confined women to roles primarily associated with motherhood and domestic responsibilities (Bao et al., 2019). However, recent economic policies in SA have marked a significant shift. The government has pledged to enhance the utilisation of women's talents by increasing their labour force participation from 17% to 25% by 2030, facilitating their professional growth (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). This commitment is reflected in Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to transform the country's economy and society by promoting inclusive economic opportunities and gender equality (Alhawsawi & Jawhar, 2023). Vision 2030 also signals a move towards a diversified, knowledge-based economy that harnesses the contributions of all members of society, including women and youth.

In this evolving landscape, the gig economy in SA, such as ride-hailing services, presents several potential advantages. It offers flexibility and new opportunities for economic participation, particularly for women who have traditionally been excluded from the workforce due to cultural and social constraints. Digital platforms within the gig economy can bridge gaps in the labour market by providing accessible employment avenues, allowing women to balance work with personal commitments more effectively. Additionally, the gig economy can contribute to economic diversification by creating new types of jobs and fostering entrepreneurship, which is crucial for the broader economic transformation envisioned by Saudi Vision 2030.

However, the gig economy is not without its disadvantages and limitations. Gig workers often face employment uncertainty, absence of benefits, and fluctuating income, which can undermine their long-term economic stability and well-being (Tan et al., 2021). Furthermore, significant ethical concerns arise regarding the potential for exploitation and inadequate legal protections. These challenges are exacerbated by a lack of comprehensive data and research specific to the Saudi context, where cultural and economic factors may uniquely influence gig work experiences (Jarrahi et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2021). Understanding these limitations is critical for ensuring that the gig economy becomes a sustainable and equitable component of the Saudi labour market.

While the global expansion of the gig economy has been widely studied, research focusing on SA remains sparse. Most existing literature primarily examines Western contexts, often overlooking how local cultural norms, economic conditions, and gender dynamics shape the gig economy in non-Western settings (Asfahani et al., 2023; Raman et al., 2023). This research gap limits the understanding of how gig work can contribute to—or hinder—the broader objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, particularly regarding gender equality and inclusive economic



progress. Addressing this gap is essential for developing policies that are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of Saudi gig workers.

Given these gaps, this study is particularly justified. By focusing on the unique characteristics and implications of gig work in SA, this research aims to provide critical insights into how local factors, including cultural norms, regulatory frameworks, and gender dynamics, influence gig workers' experiences and outcomes. This focus is timely and necessary for informing policy development in a way that ensures the gig economy aligns with the Vision 2030 objectives. Ultimately, this research will support the development of fair and inclusive labour practices, helping to realise the broader goals of Saudi Vision 2030 while safeguarding the rights and well-being of gig workers.

### **1.3 Research aim, Objectives and Questions**

#### **1.3.1 Research aim**

This research aims to contribute to understanding women's participation in SA's evolving gig economy, focusing specifically on the role of Saudi women as ride-hailing service drivers. In recent years, the Saudi government has implemented policies to enhance female workforce participation as part of its Vision 2030 initiative, aiming to diversify the economy and empower women. This study will explore how these governmental policies impact the supply side of the gig economy by examining the motivations, challenges, and overall satisfaction of female drivers. Additionally, it will investigate how these experiences might influence the demand for female gig workers in the ride-hailing industry, ultimately assessing the efficacy of these policies in promoting women's economic engagement and empowerment. The research aims are pursued through the following objectives and corresponding research questions.

### **1.3.2 Research Objectives**

To fulfil these aims, the research is structured around a series of objectives that systematically address both individual experiences and governmental efforts, progressively narrowing from a broad analysis to specific inquiries about Saudi female drivers:

- 1- To understand the broader context of women's participation in the Saudi gig economy.
- 2- To investigate the motivations behind Saudi women's choice to work as ride-hailing service drivers.
- 3- To identify the barriers and challenges Saudi women face in the ride-hailing sector.
- 4- To assess the overall satisfaction of Saudi women working as ride-hailing service drivers.
- 5- To analyse how Saudi government policies and initiatives influence the recruitment, training, and management of female drivers.
- 6- To explore the challenges the Saudi government faces in collaborating with ride-hailing companies.
- 7- To identify potential future opportunities for government collaboration with ride-hailing companies.
- 8- To develop policy recommendations aimed at empowering more women to participate in ride-hailing services.

### **1.3.3 Research Questions**

This study aims to address the following questions:

1. **What motivates Saudi female drivers to participate in ride-hailing services, and how do these motivations align with their personal and professional aspirations?**

This question explores the underlying factors driving Saudi female drivers to enter the ride-hailing sector, aligning with **Objective 1** by examining their broader participation in the Saudi gig economy, and with **Objective 2** by investigating their motivations and aspirations for personal fulfilment, economic independence, and professional development.

2. **What barriers and challenges do Saudi female drivers face in the ride-hailing sector, and how do these shape their experiences and satisfaction?**

This question investigates the obstacles Saudi female drivers encounter, such as societal norms, regulatory constraints, and operational challenges. It addresses **Objective 1** by contextualising these challenges within the Saudi gig economy, and links to **Objectives 3 and 4** by examining how barriers shape women's participation, experiences, and satisfaction.

3. **How have Saudi government policies influenced the recruitment, training, and participation of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing sector?**

This question assesses the effectiveness of government initiatives aimed at increasing female participation in the gig economy. It aligns with **Objective 1** by situating policies within the broader gig economy landscape, and directly addresses **Objectives 5 and 6** by exploring how policies shape recruitment, training, retention processes, and collaboration with ride-hailing companies.

4. **What opportunities and policy recommendations could further empower Saudi female drivers and promote inclusivity in the gig economy?**

This question identifies potential avenues to enhance the engagement of Saudi female drivers in ride-hailing services. It connects to **Objective 1** by addressing broader gig economy opportunities and aligns with **Objectives 7 and 8** by focusing on actionable policy recommendations to foster inclusivity and address systemic barriers.

Answering these research questions is in Section 9.2, as it addresses not only the individual experiences of Saudi women in the ride-hailing services but also the broader systemic factors shaped by government interventions and ride-hailing companies' operational strategies. By exploring how these entities influence women's participation in gig work, the research provides a holistic understanding of the multifaceted nature of this participation. The study offers valuable insights for academics, policymakers, ride-hailing companies, and practitioners focused on gender equality, labour markets, and economic development in SA, emphasising practical recommendations for fostering inclusivity and addressing systemic barriers.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology**

This study seeks to understand the experiences of Saudi women engaged in gig work, particularly within the ride-hailing services sector. To achieve this, a qualitative approach was employed, utilising a single case study design to explore this context in-depth. Through semi-structured interviews, 22 respondents were selected based on criteria detailed in Table 6 (Section 4.4.2), including Saudi nationality, valid car insurance, and having a minimum of one year of experience as a ride-hailing driver. A blend of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to recruit participants, ensuring the selection of a diverse and relevant group.

The study's primary second focus is on the role of key government entities such as the Future Work Company (FWC) and the Transport General Authority (TGA) in shaping the regulatory framework and support systems for female drivers. While ride-hailing service apps like Nawaam and Amnuh are included in the study, their role is supplementary, serving to provide additional perspectives that support and contextualise the data from government bodies. In addition to interviews, a documentary analysis method was utilised to enrich the data further.

This involved analysing documents and information sourced from government websites and official publications relevant to the gig economy and female employment in SA.

Given the scarcity of existing research within the Saudi Arabian (SAra) context, an inductive approach was deemed appropriate (McLaren, 2010). This approach allows the data to speak for itself, enabling the identification of themes and patterns that emerge naturally, particularly in contexts where pre-existing theories may not fully capture the local nuances. The study uniquely employs a theoretical framework that integrates Indigenous Institutional Theory and Biosocial Construction Theory, guiding the formulation of interview questions to ensure a comprehensive exploration of both individual experiences and institutional influences. This dual framework facilitates a comprehensive analysis by addressing both individual-level experiences and government-level policies, thereby enabling the integration of diverse qualitative data from interviews and documentary sources, not only to diversify but also to interpret the data effectively.

## **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis comprises nine chapters, structured as follows:

**Introduction (Chapter 1):** This chapter serves as the introduction to the thesis, offering an overview of its content. It outlines the research rationale, goals and objectives, and summarises the selected methodology and the overall structure of the thesis.

**Literature Review (Chapter 2):** This chapter comprehensively reviews the existing literature pertaining to gig work, gender dynamics in the workforce, and relevant theories. It also highlights gaps in the literature, juxtaposing various contexts with the Saudi context to provide insights into unique aspects and disparities. The conclusion of this chapter lays out the specific focus and subject of this study, namely, ride-hailing services. It sheds light on the rationale behind this particular focus and justifies its choice.

**Theoretical Framework (Chapter 3):** This chapter introduces a novel theoretical framework that encompasses both the institutional and drivers' levels, serving as a guide for the interview questions and the interpretation of the findings. The framework provides a conceptual lens through which to analyse the complexities of gig work, uncover underlying mechanisms and processes, and contribute to theoretical advancements in the study of labour markets, employment relations, and social inequality.

**Methodology (Chapter 4):** This chapter outlines the research design, methods, and procedures employed for data collection and analysis. It delves into the reasons for choosing this methodology and addresses ethical considerations pertinent to the research process.

**Findings Part I – Driver-Level Analysis (Chapter 5):** This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative research, focusing on the driver experiences, motivations, challenges, and strategies of Saudi women participating in ride-hailing services.

**Findings Part II – Institutional-Level Analysis (Chapter 6):** This chapter continues the presentation of findings but shifts the focus to the governmental level. It examines the policies, initiatives, and regulatory frameworks that influence female participation in the ride-hailing sector.

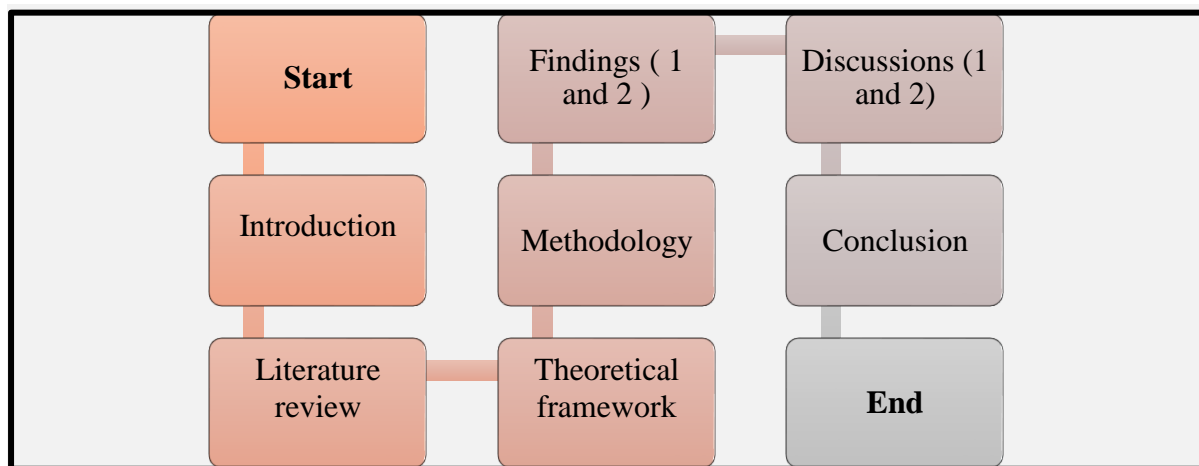
**Discussion of Female Drivers' Experiences (Chapter 7):** This chapter analyses and interprets the individual experiences, motivations, challenges and strategies of Saudi women participating in ride-hailing services. It further discusses the implications of these findings for gender empowerment and economic participation.

**Discussion of Policy Implications (Chapter 8):** This chapter shifts the focus to the governmental level, examining the policies, initiatives and regulatory frameworks implemented by the government to bolster female contribution and participation in the ride-

hailing sector. The chapter evaluates the effectiveness of these interventions and discusses potential areas for improvement.

**Conclusion (Chapter 9):** This chapter summarises the main findings of the study and revisits the objectives of the research. Additionally, theoretical and practical implications are discussed, followed by recommendations for future research and policy interventions.

*Figure 1: Structure of the thesis*



## 1.6 Chapter Summary

The introductory chapter of the thesis offered a thorough overview of the scope of the research, which centres on the examination of Saudi women’s participation in the gig economy, particularly in the ride-hailing sector. It presented the contextual backdrop of the gig economy’s global emergence, driven by technological advancements, while also addressing pertinent issues such as worker rights and gender equality concerns. Motivated by SA’s economic reforms aimed at increasing female workforce participation, the research aims to investigate the experiences of Saudi women in ride-hailing services and evaluate governmental strategies supporting their engagement. This introduction further outlined the research objectives, methodology and structure of the thesis, positioning the inquiry within the broader discourse on gender, labour markets and economic development.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, a comprehensive exploration unfolds, segmented into four sections illuminating pivotal facets of the research. The first section defines the problem at hand, delineates the methodology for the literature review, elucidates the intricacies of gig work and underlines the paramount importance of work environment within the dynamic framework of the gig economy. Transitioning to a more localised perspective, the second section delves into discussions surrounding women's empowerment against the backdrop of a traditionally conservative, male-dominated society in SA. The analysis then extends to the motivations and deterrents of women's participation in the gig economy, supported by relevant theoretical frameworks. This section thus sheds light on the complex interplay of factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the gig market. Finally, insights are consolidated by delineating the scope of the literature review, thereby setting the stage for the next phases of the research.

### **2.2 The Context of the Research Problem**

Facilitated by digitalisation and globalisation, the emergence of the gig economy has revolutionised traditional employment paradigms, offering individuals unprecedented flexibility in their work arrangements (Behl et al., 2022; Todolí-Signes, 2017). Technological advancements have catalysed a significant shift towards freelance and gig work, as evidenced by the growing number of individuals leveraging work apps to secure employment (De Stefano, 2015; Smith & Leberstein, 2015). However, despite its allure, the gig economy is fraught with challenges, including stressful work environments, inadequate remuneration, pervasive uncertainty, limited bargaining power and a lack of employment rights (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Woodcock & Graham, 2021). Moreover, women in Western societies encounter



additional hurdles, facing prejudice and enduring salary disparities across various gig professions as they endeavour to challenge traditional gender norms and break into historically male-dominated fields (Bansal et al., 2021; Churchill & Craig, 2019; Kasliwal, 2020; Tan et al., 2021a; Vyas, 2021).

Despite the drawbacks associated with gig work, such as uncertain income and challenging working conditions, it remains an attractive option for many due to its flexibility and autonomy (Bulian, 2021). Milkman et al. (2021) highlight the sentiments of female food delivery gig workers who, despite expressing dissatisfaction with aspects of their employment, appreciate the scheduling flexibility afforded by gig platforms, which allows them to navigate their familial responsibilities without compromising their earning potential. This sentiment is echoed in countries like the United Kingdom, Australia and Ireland, where women are disproportionately drawn to flexible work arrangements as a means of achieving a harmonious work-life balance (Warren, 2021). While concerns persist regarding the sustainability and equitable distribution of gig work opportunities (Myhill et al., 2021), proponents argue that gig work offers a pathway to entrepreneurship, creativity and an enhanced work-life balance (Burtch et al., 2018). Thus, despite its imperfections, gig work continues to be heralded as a viable option for those seeking greater control over their professional and personal lives.

In the cultural context of SA, the landscape of women's employment presents unique challenges shaped by entrenched social norms, particularly those advocating gender segregation (Miller et al., 2022). These norms extend to expectations that women prioritise domestic responsibilities even after graduating from university, contributing to their predominantly home-bound roles (Al-harthi, 2000). In a society where male dominance pervades, women bear the primary burden of household chores and childcare (Boca et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the advent of online gig work offers a transformative opportunity for Saudi women, allowing them to pursue employment from the confines of their homes while

adhering to cultural and religious norms. Beyond SA, remote work represents a compelling alternative for women worldwide juggling childcare and other obligations (Olson, 1983; Cserháti, 2020; Kaushik, 2020; Alon et al., 2020), offering them a pathway to economic empowerment without compromising familial and societal expectations.

In traditional organisational settings, individuals who experience discrimination often encounter barriers to employment (White et al., 2022). Women, in particular, contend with pervasive discrimination in accessing traditional employment opportunities (Nyarko, 2022). Yet, in Western liberal societies, academia widely regards gig work as a potential ‘social equaliser’ for marginalised groups (Hoang et al., 2020). As women in male-dominated societies face difficulties in securing permanent employment (Bridges et al., 2021), gig work is a promising avenue for mitigating such discrimination. Notably, gig platforms offer equitable access to income by allocating tasks based on availability and artificial intelligence (AI) mechanisms rather than personal biases (Hoang et al., 2020). Despite persistent gender inequality in traditional labour markets (Vyas, 2021), Gleim et al. (2019) argue that gig work provides a vital pathway for women to establish their professional identities free from employer biases. Moreover, engaging in gig work allows women to circumvent social stigmatisation associated with breaking traditional norms by working outside the home.

Previous research has extensively explored various aspects of women’s engagement with the gig economy, including its impact on gender equality, performance capabilities, work-life balance, financial income enhancement, and the attainment of financial independence (Vyas, 2021; Galperin, 2021; Warren, 2021; Milkman et al., 2021; Churchill & Craig, 2019). However, much of this literature is predominantly rooted in Western contexts, offering valuable insights into how gig opportunities empower women and enhance their representation in Western labour markets. The applicability of these findings to a religiously conservative country like SA remains uncertain. Contextual factors, particularly those specific to a country,

are known to significantly influence research outcomes (Whetten, 1989; Johns, 2017). Consequently, the attitudes, perceptions, and motivations of Saudi women towards online gig work may differ markedly from those of their Western counterparts. Despite the increasing interest in non-traditional employment fields among Saudi women, cultural and societal constraints often limit and restrict their ability to fully engage in such pursuits (Dukhaykh & Bilimoria, 2021). Given the limited research on this phenomenon, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, motivations, and challenges underlying Saudi women's participation in online gig work within the context of an Islamic, religiously conservative society.

### **2.3 Literature Review Methodology**

Baumeister and Leary (1997) and Tranfield et al. (2003) provide a concise definition of a literature review as a systematic approach to compiling and summarising previously conducted studies. Webster and Watson (2002) emphasise that thorough and efficient reviews establish a solid foundation upon which new information may be built, regardless of the style of the review. Notably, a literature review has the potential to address research issues comprehensively, synthesising the results and viewpoints of multiple empirical studies (Snyder, 2019). Snyder (2019) further highlights that various review methodologies, including systematic, semi-systematic and integrative approaches, can be highly beneficial depending on the research goals and the efficiency of implementation. However, Wong et al. (2013) suggest that narrative or semi-systematic review techniques were developed particularly for issues that are conceptualised and examined differently across multiple fields of research. Consequently, the aim of the narrative literature presented in this chapter is to explicate the definitions, significance, methodologies, and alternative approaches to literature reviews within the context of the gig work environment.

### **2.3.1 Aime of the Literature Review**

Conducting a narrative literature review is an apt choice in light of the burgeoning popularity of the ‘gig economy’, as noted by Healy et al. (2017). This narrative and critical literature review endeavours to evaluate past research comprehensively to unveil key gaps and challenges in the gig work environment. By synthesising and analysing the existing literature, this approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding gig work, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the subject and informing future research directions.

### **2.3.2 Research Strategy**

The methodology employed in this study for sourcing and selecting articles followed a systematic and thorough approach. Keywords pertinent to the research objectives were carefully selected based on an extensive review of abstracts from peer-reviewed journals. These keywords, including variations such as ‘gig work’, ‘women in gig work’, ‘gig economy’ and ‘gig economy in SA’, were utilised in searches on four prominent databases: ProQuest, Scopus, PsycARTICLES and PsycINFO. To achieve a comprehensive coverage of the topic, diligent efforts were made to diversify and refine the sources of articles, using platforms such as Google Scholar and the library website of the University of Reading. Articles were categorised into two groups – conceptual and empirical – distinguishing between theoretical frameworks and research findings. Additionally, a reverse search strategy was employed by scrutinising the reference lists of relevant papers to identify earlier research that may have been overlooked in the initial search. This meticulous methodology facilitated the identification and selection of a robust set of articles, contributing to the depth and breadth of the literature review.

In addition, inclusion criteria were applied to select papers that specifically addressed the gig economy, covering various facets of gig employment while providing substantive insights into

challenges, repercussions and research gaps. A prerequisite for inclusion was publication in a peer-reviewed journal, which ensured the credibility and rigour of the selected studies. Recent publications (from the last decade) were prioritised for relevance and currency. Through the systematic application of this search methodology, the objective was to compile a diverse array of academic materials contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the gig economy and its multifaceted implications.

### **2.3.3 Selection Criteria**

Among the inclusion criteria, academic publications had to be sourced from peer-reviewed journals and published in English. Conversely, exclusion criteria included non-English language publications, presentations, work-in-progress documents, or drafts. The selection process was autonomous, entailing the examination of titles and abstracts against the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Throughout the research, the focus remained primarily on the drivers' level of analysis. Data extracted from the selected articles (citations and thematic content) were meticulously catalogued and stored separately to refine study directions and insights. Specifically, the collated data comprised the publication year, authorship details, key conclusions and the advantages and disadvantages associated with gig labour. However, this review consolidates and integrates solely the emergent literature about gig work, owing to the scarcity of theories and descriptive research and the presence of inconsistent terminology within the field (Cropanzano et al., 2023).

These requirements are substantiated by the necessity to cultivate a comprehensive and contemporary understanding of the gig economy. The literature review is poised to offer valuable insights into the nature of gig employment, shed light on the challenges faced by gig workers and delineate their impact on well-being by incorporating research employing diverse methodologies and focusing on various aspects of gig labour (Schlagwein et al., 2020). The

inclusion of recent research ensures that the findings reflect current trends and developments in the gig economy landscape. Yet, potential limitations inherent in the selection criteria must be acknowledged. The focus on English-language literature may introduce bias against works in other languages, while the omission of earlier studies risks overlooking important historical perspectives. Nonetheless, these criteria were deemed sufficient for achieving the study objectives given the breadth of the analysis and the imperative to explore contemporary issues and trends in gig labour.

#### **2.3.4 Data Extraction and Synthesis**

The method employed for data organisation was theme analysis, whereby the selected papers were examined for recurring themes and patterns. Pertinent data corresponding to each theme were extracted and catalogued. These themes encompassed a spectrum of facets related to gig work, including the diverse forms of gig employment, such as app-based work, crowd work and capital platform work. Additionally, themes addressed the intrinsic characteristics of gig work, like autonomy, freedom and flexibility, alongside challenges such as income instability, lack of employment benefits and protections and uncertain job options. Furthermore, the analysis covered issues such as exploitative working conditions, work-life balance, social isolation, health and safety concerns, research gaps and methodological restrictions. Through this thematic analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of gig work was cultivated, facilitating insights into its complexities and implications.

A crucial observation gleaned from this literature review is the predominance of findings derived from Western contexts. Although the evolution of work culture and the gig economy may not be novel concepts, their implications for developing nations, particularly how employees engage with digital platforms for work and navigate local environments, bear great significance. As highlighted by Elbanna and Idowu (2022), it is crucial to take into account the

viewpoints and responses of persons in developing countries to fully comprehend gig work, going beyond Western concepts of employment. Consequently, the literature review underscored the imperative for a clear and extensive understanding of women's perceptions, motivations and career challenges in gig work. This emphasis stemmed from a notable gap in research concerning Saudi women's experiences with gig work. The evolving role of Saudi women, transitioning from 'cultural repositories' of traditional beliefs to active 'partners' in nation-building (Alharbi, 2022), further accentuates the relevance and urgency of this study.

### **2.3.5 Data Analysis**

Watson et al. (2021) and Scully-Russ and Torraco (2020) conducted integrative and systematic literature reviews to define the contours of gig work, shedding light on its definition and conceptual underpinnings. Conversely, Behl et al. (2021), Milkman et al. (2021), Churchill and Craig (2019) and Wood et al. (2019) employed survey methodologies to evaluate job quality and address gender disparities in the gig economy, thereby contributing empirical evidence to the discourse. Myhill et al. (2021) and Montgomery and Baglioni (2021) utilised interview techniques to question the fairness of gig employment and conceptualise the gig economy from a qualitative standpoint, enriching the literature with nuanced perspectives. Wu et al. (2019) adopted a mixed-methods approach to investigate gig labour in China, offering fresh empirical insights into labour regulation across digital platforms. While most publications focus on the unique challenges and inequalities experienced by gig workers, the aforementioned studies contribute to theorising, regulating and organising the gig economy, making valuable contributions to the broader discourse.

Thus, an exhaustive examination of previous studies in the field is imperative to grasp the intricacies of the gig economy, particularly in the SAra context. The next sections of this chapter will offer a detailed account of the structure and dynamics of gig labour as described

in pertinent research. Various dimensions of gig employment have been examined, from worker motivations, job satisfaction and income volatility to social and economic ramifications and legal considerations. Through a comprehensive review of the existing literature, potential knowledge gaps can be identified for further inquiry and a better understanding of the potentials and challenges of gig work. Future research stands to augment and refine the findings of prior studies, thereby fostering a more holistic understanding of the gig economy and its implications for workers, businesses and the broader societal fabric.

## **2.4 Gig Work**

The varying perspectives on gig labour underscore its status as a modern iteration of a contentious approach to employment (Reynolds & Kincaid, 2023). While some individuals currently reap the benefits of gig work, others harbour concerns regarding potential future drawbacks (Maffie, 2023; Herrmann et al., 2023). Further empirical investigations examining short- and long-term regulatory frameworks, policies, laws and definitional parameters are warranted as researchers have only begun to scratch the surface of the gig economy and its implications. Therefore, a clear definition of ‘gig labour’ must first be established, and its relevance as a solution to specific professional challenges must be determined. The next subsection examines the nature of gig work and why it is the focus of the present research.

### **2.4.1 What is Gig Work?**

The terms ‘gig economy’ and ‘gig work’ emerged during the financial crisis of 2007–2008, driven by organisations’ interest in minimising labour costs (Hook, 2015). A gig economy can be characterised as a marketplace where short-term, on-demand and sporadic labour opportunities prevail, facilitated by digital platforms (Myhill et al., 2021). Platforms such as Upwork and Fiverr in Europe and the US (Minter, 2017) and Mostaqel, TasmeemMe and Baaed in the Arabic-speaking world serve as conduits for job allocation. On these platforms,



individuals offer their services, and customers or organisations solicit workers to undertake tasks, known as gigs. The platform typically earns a commission for each gig facilitated through its services. Therefore, gig work can be conceptualised as ‘platform-based employment which uses digital technology to mediate the process of commissioning, supervising, delivery, and compensating work performed by workers on a contingent, piece-work basis’ (Flanagan, 2017, p. 2).

Gig jobs encompass a wide array of online and offline services, ranging from digital designs, consultations, studies and software development to voice-overs (Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018). Offline services include tasks like gardening (e.g. TaskRabbit), delivery services (e.g. Deliveroo and Uber Eats), taxi services (e.g. Uber) and other labour-based services (Tan et al., 2021b). Regardless of whether it is conducted online or offline, gig work is characterised by its digital nature, facilitated by technology and platforms (De Groen et al., 2016; Huws et al., 2018). The emergence of new digital platforms has not only paved the way for novel forms of work but also revolutionised how freelancers seek out new opportunities (Sutherland et al., 2020).

The concept of gigs, or digital task-based labour, is perceived to cover a broad spectrum of activities spanning various sectors and diverse types of businesses, resulting in a somewhat ambiguous understanding of the term (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Distinguishing gig work from other contemporary forms of work, such as crowdsourcing/crowd work or on-demand work, poses a challenge (Pustulka-Hunt et al., 2019). Frequently, gig labour is classified based on the rationales provided by workers for opting into it, including bridge employment, temporary work between career transitions or full-time positions and supplemental income generation in the absence of regular full-time employment opportunities (Donovan et al., 2016). Ultimately, two primary categories of work can be delineated: on-demand work facilitated by applications, which pertains to conventional job activities mediated by online platforms

typically accessed via mobile devices, and task fulfilment via online platforms (De Stefano, 2015).

Schmidt (2017) further divides web-based digital labour, or cloud work, into six categories: (1) household and personal services, (2) contest-based creative crowd work, (3) micro-tasking crowd work, (4) accommodation, (5) transportation and delivery services and (6) freelance marketplaces. Various terms are employed interchangeably to describe the gig economy, such as the ‘sharing economy’, ‘gift economy’, ‘collaborative economy’, ‘platform economy’ and ‘crowd work’. The burgeoning interest in gig labour is evident from the scholarly output and publication trends highlighted by Watson et al. (2021). Since 2015, there has been a significant increase in academic interest, with 28 papers addressing gig labour, 17 articles focussing on the sharing economy, six publications studying crowd work, and three studies examining the platform economy. The surge in academic investigation throughout the last six years highlights the changing characteristics of employment and the growing appeal of gig work in both formal academic discussions and popular media narratives.

To summarise, the terms ‘gig economy’ and ‘gig workers’ proposed by Heeks (2019) and Watson et al. (2021) serve as umbrella terms denoting transient, one-time occupations remunerated per task or project. Conversely, Gandini (2019) and Smith (2016) suggest phrases like ‘digital gig employment’ or ‘technology-enabled gig work’ to underscore the role of platforms. Nevertheless, all gig workers share fundamental characteristics, prompting the use of phrases like ‘platform labour’ to emphasise unique attributes such as the use of platforms (Heeks, 2019; Watson et al., 2021). The next section will explore the reasons for the decision to investigate the subject of gig employment and the factors that drive workers to choose gig labour.

In light of the dearth of well-defined empirical findings or established theories concerning gig labour in SA, the potential ramifications and implications of these definitions and simplifications assume paramount importance in this study. By providing fresh perspectives on the feasibility of formal and informal workplaces operating within platform-based frameworks, this study holds the promise of stimulating the exploration of innovative employment models by the Saudi government. Additionally, it has the potential to shed light on how gig labour may affect workers across various dimensions, particularly in the context of job assignment selection. Consequently, Saudi women engaged in both full-time and part-time employment could derive significant benefits from this insight, as it could enable them to refine their gig practices and opt for assignments that align more closely with their preferences. Furthermore, within the domain of gig work, individuals may exhibit diverse behaviours aimed at meeting familial obligations, attaining greater financial independence, or enhancing their professional status when afforded complete autonomy over their work schedules and productivity.

#### **2.4.2 Why Gig Work?**

Several external forces have altered the structure, administration, and dynamics of wage labour, ushering in a new era for the concept of 'work' and its social relevance (Burke & Ng, 2006). In response to the growing need for human labour in factories, the traditional concept of a 'job' emerged around the dawn of the industrial revolution (Landry et al., 2005). With the ascendancy of industrial production lines over artisanal craftsmanship, work itself underwent a shift towards routine tasks (Wren, 2011). Consequently, the essence of work transitioned from an activity wherein individuals employed their skills to produce valuable goods to a 'job' characterised by the completion of a limited set of tasks in exchange for compensation (Maitland & Thomson, 2011). This trend toward 'work simplification' first took root in the industrial industry and then spread to other fields (Parker et al., 2001). Moreover, the conceptualisation of employees as 'social beings' heralded a paradigm shift in the perception

of individuals; this culminated in the emergence of the 'human relations' movement, which emphasised the importance of employee psychology and alignment between individuals and the organisation, in contrast to the previously dominant mechanistic approach to labour (Smith, 1998).

According to post-industrial society theorists, the way modern societies manage their workforces is heavily influenced by the rate of technology development and the extent to which new technologies are integrated into existing ones (Landry et al., 2005). Mortensen and Pissarides (1998) note that technological advancements have the potential to both generate and eliminate job opportunities. A growing body of empirical research on individual proletarianisation and the impact of modern technology provides evidence of both up/reskilling and deskilling due to technological advancement (Carey, 2007; Gallie, 1991). Many people are arguing over whether or not certain kinds of 'upskilling' are just a cover for reducing skills (Taylor & Bain, 2003). Nonetheless, scholars contend that technological progress has led to the polarisation of employment quality, exacerbating inequalities between individuals at the apex and base of the skills hierarchy (Goos & Manning, 2007).

As a consequence, connectivity to a network rather than a physical office has become indispensable for job engagement as the information system emerges as the cornerstone of all organisational activities (Landry et al., 2005). A 'global' or 'international' workforce, consisting of both domestic and international candidates, has emerged as a result of the increase in remote work (Vance & Paik, 2015). This creates several problems for businesses dealing with a worldwide workforce, including more competition for jobs, lower pay, and more 'offshoring' in the service sector (Metters & Verma, 2008; Burke & Ng, 2006). Despite the advantages of a more flexible work-life balance and the ease with which information can be shared and digital applications developed, the lines between work and personal life have begun to blur (Townsend & Batchelor, 2005; Hill et al., 2003).

In Western societies such as those of Europe, digital labour platforms have witnessed a notable increase in female participation, with women currently comprising 38% of platform employees and the proportion of younger women deriving their earnings solely from online platforms experiencing a 7.1 percentage point surge between 2017 and 2018 (Brancati et al., 2020). The rise of the platform economy has immediate implications for the institutional organisation of work and employment, fundamentally altering key features of the labour landscape with significant gendered ramifications. These include access to employment opportunities, structural inequality and precarious employment, working practices and overall working conditions (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022). Despite the progressive involvement of women in labour platform activities, research on the online work practices of Saudi women remains scarce. Existing studies of women and technology (e.g. Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Binsah et al., 2015; Elamin & Omair, 2010; Metcalfe, 2007) primarily address women's challenges from a global standpoint, whereas research specific to Saudi women predominantly focuses on employment and workplace dynamics.

As previously mentioned, the working conditions of individuals engaged by digital platforms are markedly inferior to those of their counterparts in more traditional employment arrangements (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2017). They are deprived of minimum wages, sick or annual leave entitlements and pension benefits. Moreover, they have to procure their own tools, manage their personal tax and legal affairs and contend with on-demand scheduling without assured, fixed remuneration (McCann & Murray, 2010). This spotlight on the disparities in working conditions between the gig economy and traditional employment opportunities has ignited a fervent debate among legal scholars regarding the necessity for a new classification of work situated between full-time employment and independent contracting to accommodate the expansion of the gig economy (De Stefano, 2015; Harris & Krueger, 2015; Minifie & Wiltshire, 2016; Stewart & Stanford, 2017). An examination of these challenges would equip

scholars with insights for developing theories, strategies and practices aimed at helping various categories of gig workers achieve success.

Addressing these concerns in the Saudi context can fill numerous gaps in the research. Online freelancing markets, in general, grapple with information asymmetries because they rely on text-based communications, which can introduce uncertainty and hinder trade (Hong et al., 2016; Srivastava & Chandra, 2018). Various levels of uncertainty arise from interactions between buyers and freelancers, likely influencing application and hiring processes (Ludwig et al., 2022). Hence, the exploratory nature of this study fosters a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the diverse experiences that Saudi women may encounter in gig labour, although they are not alone in facing these challenges.

### **2.4.3 Gig Workers' Demographics**

According to a survey conducted by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, gig work holds particular appeal for young individuals aged 16–30 years. However, it's noteworthy that gig workers predominantly fall within the mid-range of age groups; over half, approximately 52 percent, are between the ages of 31 to 54 (Balaram et al., 2017). Additionally, according to a study that looked at the link between gig work and jobs with little skill, like shipping services, about 40% of gig workers have bachelor's degrees or above, which is on par with the general population (Balaram et al., 2017). Furthermore, the studies by Balaram et al. (2017) and Huws et al. (2017) used limited sample sizes, leading to statistically significant variations in the estimates of female involvement in gig work in the UK, ranging from 25% to 59%.

Studies reveal complex patterns rather than a straightforward narrative when considering ethnicity-related factors in gig work participation. For instance, Stokes et al. (2014) highlight that participation in gig work may vary significantly based on demographic and socio-

economic factors. However, their research does not provide definitive evidence that individuals from ethnic minorities are underrepresented in gig work. Instead, it points to disparities that may be influenced by other variables, such as access to technology, or the types of platforms studied. Conversely, De Groen and Maselli (2016) suggest that racial or ethnic minorities may be overrepresented in specific gig work contexts, particularly in the United States. Their findings indicate that 55% of gig workers in the U.S. identified as belonging to a minority group, compared to 34% of the non-gig workforce. These discrepancies could stem from differences in geographic focus, platform types, and sample populations. Together, these studies underscore the heterogeneity of gig workforces and highlight the need for further research to explore how ethnicity intersects with other variables, such as education, income, and platform-specific opportunities, to shape participation trends in the gig economy.

In the Saudi context, demographic factors may vary. However, age, employment status, financial situation, lifestyle and personality are identified as pivotal variables (Almarshad, 2015; Kwong et al., 2003). Men and women may have differing perceptions of engaging in gig work because of the disparate treatment they receive in Western cultures as a result of their distinct characteristics. Nevertheless, the following questions arise: do factors such as marital status, income, age, gender, education, family size and occupation significantly influence the likelihood of women becoming gig workers in SA? To what extent could demographic factors influence the trajectory of the Saudi gig economy? Moreover, what contextual conditions in SA indicate a conducive environment for women to participate in gig work? These rhetorical questions serve to delve deeper into the exploration of the experiences of Saudi women in gig work. In this context, demographic factors encompass diverse elements that shed light on the experience of working in the gig work environment from a woman's viewpoint.

#### **2.4.4 Job Quality and Satisfaction in the Gig Economy**

Although many gig platform employees report positive practices and experiences with their jobs, others encounter challenges such as harsh treatment or sexual harassment (Anderson et al., 2021). Although there is growing political attention, research on gig work and job quality remains nascent (Myhill et al., 2021). Present research often fails to contextualise empirical findings within broader discussions of work quality and condition and what constitutes a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ employment (International Labour Organisation, 2018). The considerable gap between gig labour and traditional employment presents a notable challenge in terms of preserving employees' rights (Duggan et al., 2020). Critics have highlighted the lack of comprehensive analysis regarding the complexities of gig employment (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). Moreover, inconsistencies exist in the legal classification of gig workers, which affects their eligibility for employment and welfare benefits. Specific online platforms designate some individuals as employees while categorising others as self-employed (Forde et al., 2017).

The task of defining work quality in human resource management is complex due to its direct association with employee happiness and motivation (Grote & Guest, 2017). Despite extensive research, consensus on how to define and conceptualise successful work remains elusive (Findlay et al., 2013; Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). Media reports often highlight individuals' experiences in the gig economy, revealing that many are grappling with precarious financial situations, sometimes earning below minimum wage while facing considerable personal risks and financial insecurity (O'Connor, 2016). In addition, there have been concerns expressed over the safety of gig workers and the consequences of invasive monitoring and unconstitutional gathering of data (Healy et al., 2017). According to IOSH (2017), temporary workers consistently experience a lower level of workplace safeguards for their well-being and safety compared to their full-time colleagues.



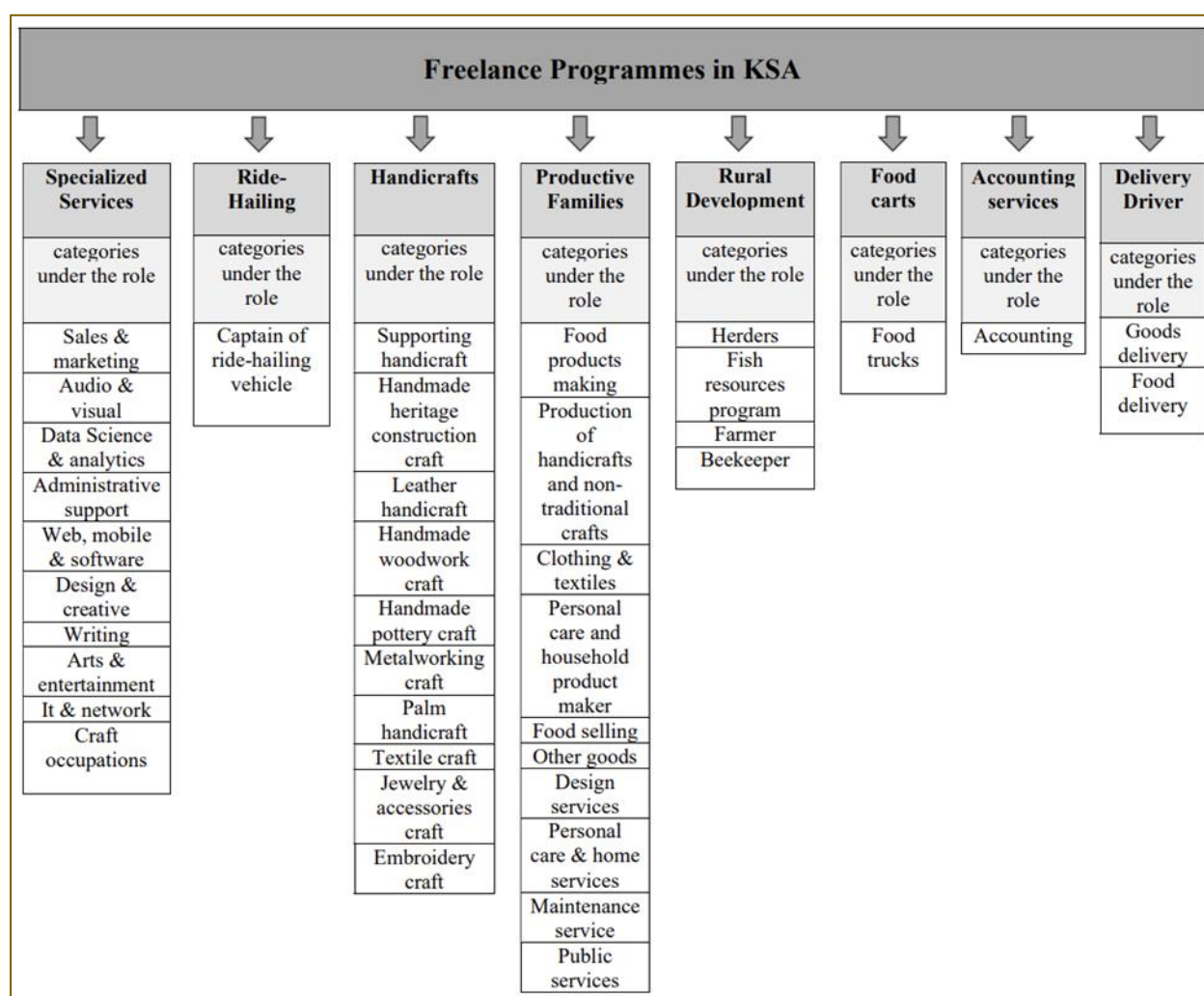
Therefore, more studies are required to examine the influence and significance of different types of employee involvement in terms of job quality. Although evidence suggests that direct participation can improve job quality (Gonzalez, 2010), a deeper understanding is required of the factors influencing its adoption in European contexts, as well as the conditions under which it is expected to be beneficial. In SA, conversely, cultural norms prioritise loyalty as a primary indicator of behavioural intentions and job satisfaction (Clarke et al., 2022). However, there is insufficient data from SA to substantiate claims regarding gig workers' job satisfaction or the quality of their psychological working conditions. Given the pivotal role of technology in gig labour (Prassl, 2018), the next section further delves into the impact of technological advancements on Saudi women, thereby adding depth to the ongoing discourse. First, however, it is imperative to examine how the growth of gig economy is shaped within Saudi culture, notably through government-sponsored initiatives like Saudi Vision 2030, and how these initiatives intersect with reforms for women's empowerment.

## **2.5 Saudi Arabia**

According to information provided by Freelance (n.d.), the SAra government has launched a programme aimed at organising and enhancing the freelance economy in the country and, thus, offering alternative employment avenues for Saudi individuals, irrespective of their gender. This programme simplifies the process of obtaining a freelancing certificate, enabling immediate access to its benefits. In line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD) has introduced the freelance programme to engage local talents, individuals seeking income opportunities and self-employed workers, both male and female, across the country. The MHRSD invites those interested in the programme's objectives, which include fostering participation, nurturing relevant skills and cultivating a stable, secure and productive freelance economy.

The MHRSD programme covers a wide range of professions, such as ride-hailing, crafts, rural development, productive families, mobile restaurants, delivery drivers and accounting services (see Figure 2). The SAra government offers financial assistance to gig workers with a freelancer certificate. The information provided in Freelance (n.d.) states that the MHRSD grants a freelancer certificate to those who have shown expertise in a certain field. Through the official freelancing platform, the certificate allows people to work freely in fields sanctioned by the Ministry. The freelancer certificate has several advantages, including the opportunity to create a bank account, use digital payment systems, expand one's pool of potential revenue sources and sign up for social insurance.

**Figure 2: Freelance programme categories in SA**



The objective of this governmental programme is to empower both men and women in the gig work environment, aligning with the vision of the kingdom established by Prince Mohammed bin Salman to reduce unemployment rates among both genders. However, as noted by Al-Rasheed (2013), the Saudi woman embodies family honour and national feminine identity, shaped by the cultural interpretation of Islamic theology prevalent in SA. Therefore, comprehending how the gig economy impacts the gender gap and the experiences of Saudi women in the labour market necessitates an understanding of how Saudi gender norms permeate the workplace and influence women's opportunities for advancement. SA holds a distinct position among Islamic nations (Sian et al., 2020), having never been colonized, unlike many Arab countries (Baydoun & Willett, 1995). Consequently, religious nationalism has flourished in an environment of official tolerance and widespread endorsement (Doumato, 1992). While the King serves as the head of state and ultimate ruler, any endeavours aimed at addressing gender disparities must incorporate the teachings of the country's religious scholars to garner their support and enhance their understanding of the significance of reform (Doumato, 1992; Al-Rasheed, 2013).

Even though SA's state and religion are closely intertwined, the Saudi government has announced plans to reform the country's Islamic institutions and organisations. These changes are purportedly aimed at transitioning from 'ultra-conservative Islam' to a more moderate version (Topal, 2019). These reforms are expected to lead to positive changes in the status of women in the country. Vision 2030 places a significant emphasis on female empowerment, recognising that enabling Saudi women, who constitute over half of the population, to participate in and contribute their skills and talents to the Saudi labour market is crucial to achieving this goal (Alotaibi, 2020). The next subsection will delve deeper into the Saudi reforms targeting women's participation in the workforce.

### **2.5.1 Saudi Vision 2030 and Women's Empowerment**

Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of SA, has initiated a comprehensive reform programme known as Vision 2030, which aims to transform the Kingdom of SA into a more prosperous nation (Khan, 2019). As part of this initiative, the SA government has introduced the National Economic Transformation 2020 Programme (AlSharari, 2020). While recognising the crucial role that women play in family development, which is seen as a cornerstone of strength for achieving national goals and fostering societal cohesion (Alghamdi et al., 2022), Vision 2030 aims to increase female labour force participation from the current 22% to 30% across all industries by 2030 (Sabir, 2019). Investing in the education of women and girls is considered one of the most beneficial investments a country can make for its development (Ozturk, 2011). Consequently, government efforts to promote female education have resulted in a growing number of women pursuing higher education (Abalkhail, 2017).

In addition to advancements in education, the goal is to empower women across all sectors. Narayan (2002) defines empowerment as gaining access to and assuming responsibility for choices and resources that impact one's quality of life. According to a primary data statistics report, Saudi women have seen significant improvements in the job market, education, economic engagement and gender equality (Parveen, 2022). The Ministry of Labour and Social Development recently reported that over half a million Saudi women have entered the Saudi labour market (Parveen, 2022). However, Saudi culture includes customs that limit women's participation in various social activities and occupations (Al-Qahtani et al., 2021). Therefore, developing a comprehensive understanding of gig job opportunities facilitated by the growth of digital platforms in the Saudi workforce is crucial, especially considering that the topic of women's participation in religiously conservative cultures like that of SA is under-explored.

According to Kenney and Zysman (2019) and Srnicek (2017), gig work is characterised by the use of digital infrastructures to enable connections across different groups, such as service

consumers, content suppliers, advertising, and application developers. However, the transition to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted gender inequality and the needs of women and other vulnerable groups (Alon et al., 2020; Galasso, 2020; Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020). As noted by several academics (Alfarran et al., 2018; Bahudhailah, 2019; Schein, 2007; Ginige et al., 2007), in countries like SA, women encounter numerous obstacles in the workplace, particularly related to gender stereotypes. Various barriers, such as changes in marital status, pregnancy, childcare responsibilities and institutional constraints, may hinder women from pursuing their desired professions throughout their careers (Ud Din et al., 2020).

### **2.5.2 The Conservative Saudi Labour Market**

The digitisation of Saudi society is a response to the significant decrease in global oil prices; the goal is to reduce reliance on oil revenue by spearheading digitalisation for economic growth (Ben Youssef et al., 2021). Technology-based information and communication play critical roles in economic, agricultural, corporate and social advancement, offering new opportunities for human progress and women's empowerment in various fields (Suresh, 2011). These advancements also contribute significantly to women's empowerment in the workforce (Nikulin, 2017), creating job opportunities and flexible work arrangements for them (Khalaf et al., 2020; Orabi et al., 2019). However, the involvement of women in the labour force may be affected by several different circumstances.

The Saudi context differs significantly from other national settings (Alarifi & Husain, 2023). In individualistic cultures such as those of the United States, Australia and most Western European countries, individuals tend to operate independently, whereas in collectivist societies like SA, groups hold greater importance (Whiteoak et al., 2006). Moreover, individuals in collectivist cultures such as SA prioritise the opinions of others more than their counterparts in individualistic societies (Günsoy et al., 2015). SA consistently scores higher than the United

States and the United Kingdom on Hofstede's collectivism scale across multiple studies (Cassell & Blake, 2012). Collectivism permeates various aspects of Saudi life, including consumer behaviour, business success, organisational culture, personal networking, client relationships, psychological contracts, managerial coaching, performance appraisal, e-learning and decision-making (Opoku, 2012; Cassell & Blake, 2012; Al-Otaibi, 2014; Jiang Lo et al., 2012; Agourram, 2014; Aldossari & Robertson, 2014; Noer et al., 2007; Harbi et al., 2017; Alamri & Cristea, 2014; Al Suwaidi, 2008).

Encouraging women's participation in various fields of development is a global priority across all countries, whether individualistic or collectivistic (Alshmary et al., 2021). SA, in particular, has made significant strides in this regard, transitioning from being one of the three lowest-ranked countries (142nd out of 144) in terms of female economic participation in the 2017 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report to being elected as a new member of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in 2018 (Saleh & Malibari, 2021). However, to fully understand the connection and relationship between Saudi women and gig labour in a collectivistic culture, it is essential to grasp the influence of Islamic culture on society. In collectivist cultures like SA, individuals often prioritise the integrity of their in-group, even at the expense of their personal interests (Senan et al., 2019).

The status of women in SA is similar to the status of women in Europe in the Middle Ages (Ward, 2016). Women in SA are considered significantly weaker than men by their society, their families and themselves (Alasgah & Rizk, 2021). Moreover, women are regarded as homemakers rather than breadwinners (Elamin & Omair, 2010). This governing logic of the Islamic religious society is dominated by the *Quran* (the holy text of God), which states that

*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more [strength] than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them [first], [Next,] refuse to share their beds, [And last] beat them [lightly]; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means [of annoyance]: For Allah is Most High, great [above you all].<sup>1</sup>*

Given that the Kingdom of SA acts as the custodian of Islam's most sacred cities, Makkah and Madinah (Utomo et al., 2018), Saudi society upholds these values with utmost reverence and protection. Consequently, societal norms, which are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, emphasise the protection of women by men and their exemption from the necessity of earning money (Almobaireek & Manolova, 2013). Islamic scholars in SA advocate for women to primarily remain in the home and avoid mixed-gender workplaces, with any necessary employment ideally conducted in segregated settings (Sadiqi, 2014). Consequently, socio-cultural norms represent significant barriers for women seeking paid employment outside the home, which often comes at the expense of their domestic responsibilities (Elamin & Omair, 2010). In this predominantly male-dominated society, marriage is paramount to a woman's self-image, given that unmarried women are generally viewed as inferior to their married counterparts (Racy, 1980). Consequently, upon marriage, women strive to uphold their societal status, employing various means to safeguard their overall position within the social hierarchy (Douki et al., 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> *Quran*, Surah An-Nisa, 4:34, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Available at: <https://myislam.org/surah-an-nisa/ayat-34/> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

This perspective may lead women to perceive themselves as less competent than men in fulfilling job responsibilities and feel less suited to achieving a work-life balance than to maintaining stability in their home lives (Kim & Gong, 2017; Leslie et al., 2012). As a result, it is hypothesised that in this cultural context, women are more inclined than men to opt for gig work. Essentially, due to the societal, familial and personal obligations imposed upon them, women may find it more challenging than men to take time off from work when their family duties require their attention (Nockolds, 2017). Therefore, online gig platforms can provide an attractive opportunity for Saudi women to enter the workforce while accommodating the pressures exerted by societal norms. The next sections will explore the motivating factors and obstacles influencing women's participation in gig jobs, highlighting the existing gap in the literature that has yet to be addressed in this specific context.

## **2.6 Push Factors for Women to Embrace Gig Work**

The gig economy is experiencing steady growth globally. Around one in four employees in the US participates in gig work, with 44% of gig workers considering it their primary income source. Predictions suggest that the global gig economy market will expand at a compound annual growth rate of 17.4%, reaching \$455.2 billion by 2023 from \$296.7 billion in 2020 (World Economic Forum, n.d.). This trend is particularly noticeable in affluent nations. For instance, in the UK, the gig workforce grew from 2.3 million in 2016 to 4.7 million in 2019 (Broda, 2022). The gig economy's impact extends to underdeveloped countries like India, where it has the potential to create 90 million jobs, constituting about 30% of the non-farming workforce and accounting for 1.25% of the country's GDP (Kumar, 2021).

The presence of women in gig jobs is significant. Katz and Krueger (2016) analysed secondary data from 2005 to 2015 and found that women had a marginally higher likelihood compared to men to engage in various forms of gig work, such as temporary agency work, on-call work,



contract work and freelance work. This trend was corroborated by data from the US's largest food delivery platforms, where 48% of delivery gig workers were women (Selyukh, 2019). In the US, earnings from digital platforms have increasingly become women's primary source of income (Churchill & Craig, 2019). A review of the literature on women's motivations for seeking gig jobs highlights two primary factors: the inherent flexibility of gig work, which enables work-life balance, and the ability of gig jobs to accommodate family responsibilities while affording women financial independence.

Given the unique socio-cultural context of SA, understanding the motivations of Saudi women for choosing gig employment is essential. The existing literature predominantly focuses on Western cultures, and exploring this topic in the Saudi context can produce valuable insights for understanding the gig economy not only in SA but also in similar contexts in the broader Muslim world. By reviewing relevant literature, identifying key keywords and examining referenced material, researchers can begin to address this knowledge gap. The findings of such studies can contribute significantly to ongoing discussions and lay the groundwork for future research in this field.

### **2.6.1 Flexibility and Work-Life Balance**

One of the leading theories explaining the lack of representation of women in the workforce is the gender role theory (Rudman et al., 2012; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). According to this theory, societies and women perceive men as the primary 'breadwinners' while the woman's role is to take care of the family and be involved in 'home-making' activities (Adom & Anambane, 2020). Consequently, women often perceive themselves as responsible for aligning their work schedule with their family schedule to ensure full coordination between the two and prevent mistakes for which they might be blamed by their husbands and society (Arendell, 2001; Daly, 2001; Thompson, 1996). This necessity of coordination between professional work

and home-life schedules, as well as the cultural and societal expectations regarding adapting job requirements and schedules to family commitments often leads women to turn to gig work instead of traditional types of work (Ashford et al., 2018).

Gig work provides flexibility and autonomy, given that work is available at any time and in any location (Huws et al., 2018; Wood et al., 2019). Hence, according to a body of qualitative and quantitative research, the primary documented motivation for embracing gig work is spatial and temporal freedom (Berg et al., 2018; Schor & Vallas, 2021). Researchers also believe that gig work in the Western context is a perfect working model to enable flexibility and work-life balance, as concluded in a review by Warren (2021). Gig work also enables individuals to work whenever convenient according to their personal calendar (Ravenelle, 2019). As noted in the quantitative research by Churchill and Craig (2019), women prefer gig work so that they can work when their children are in school and turn the application off when they return.

Milkman et al. (2021) interviewed 55 White American women working in delivery through an online gig platform in the US. The primary motivation cited in this study was scheduling flexibility, which facilitates the balance between family care and paid work. These findings show that gig work has considerable benefits for women who want to save time as well as be available for family responsibilities when required. According to some qualitative papers, participants in the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy research (Broughton et al., 2018) frequently stated that they had greater control over what they did and how they did it in gig work. Some people indicated that they could manage their schedule by accepting or declining employment, while others said that they could work extremely hard for a period and then take a break. In a study of Western countries, Piasna and Drahokoupil (2017) emphasised that gig work saves travelling time and increases free time for non-work activities. Milkman et al. (2021) also pointed out that platform-based employees enjoy much scheduling flexibility,

as expressed by one of the subjects: ‘I become addicted to making my schedule, not having a manager, having flexibility and independence’.

While recognising the salient benefits of gig work for women in Western society, it prompts inquiry into whether Saudi women would perceive these advantages similarly. The available data presents challenges to this assessment. The reference to a change in the unemployment rate from 6% to 5.22% in 2021, as reported by the General Authority for Statistics (2021), appears contradictory and requires clarification. If the intention is to imply a decrease in the unemployment rate, the numbers provided need further elaboration, as a decline from 6% to 5.22% would signify a reduction, not a rise, in the unemployment rate. Additionally, the timeframe for this change is inadequately specified, leaving ambiguity regarding whether it denotes a starting or ending point, thereby complicating the interpretation of the statistical trend. Furthermore, to construct a coherent argument regarding the comparability of gig work benefits between Saudi and Western women, it is imperative to include data on the participation rate of Saudi women in gig work. Without such statistics, the relevance of juxtaposing the unemployment rates of Saudi women with those of Western women remains unclear.

### **2.6.2 Income and Financial Independence**

The second leading motivator for women in Western societies to engage in gig work is to improve their income (Milkman et al., 2021). Gig work opens new avenues for revenue production, offering new freedoms for microentrepreneurs and women without employers or set work hours (Schor & Vallas, 2021). As summarised in a review paper by Ashford et al. (2018), the primary motivation for seeking work on these platforms is to overcome the perception of financial insecurity. During financial hardship, women can secure funds, gaining a greater sense of confidence (Myhill et al., 2021). Gig work thus offers an excellent solution to the challenges faced by Western women, especially single mothers, in maintaining financial

security while providing them with the flexibility to provide appropriate care for their children (Barratt et al., 2020; Webster & Zhang, 2020).

The perspective of Saudi women differs significantly from that of women in Western societies regarding financial responsibility and societal norms. According to Islamic teachings, men are obligated to provide for women, whether they are fathers, brothers, husbands, or previous husbands (in the case of single mothers), as emphasised by Barlas and Finn (2019). It is socially unacceptable for brothers or fathers to leave women without a secure income, as noted by Verheul et al. (2012). Additionally, statistics reveal that Saudi women borrow only 6% of their income from financial institutions, a notably lower percentage compared to roughly 24% in Australia and 25% in Canada (Ali et al., 2021). These statistics underscore the male-dominated nature of Islamic society, where religious beliefs dictate that men are responsible for economic activities while women are primarily tasked with child-rearing and home management. While the gendered division of responsibilities prescribed by Islamic teachings could be viewed as beneficial in materialistic and post-materialistic societies like those in the West (Strenze, 2021), it may face challenges in a spiritual community like SA. Consequently, understanding the motivations of women in Saudi society requires careful investigation.

## **2.7 Pull Factors for Women to Embrace Gig Work**

In this section, the exploration delves into the challenges faced by Western women that deter them from participating in gig work, including discrimination, career difficulties, and other disadvantages. Stereotyping theory will be utilised to highlight the arguments employed to discriminate against women. Next, career preference theories will be employed to emphasise the main deterring factors that result in career challenges for women. Determining the foundational ideas on which such arguments might be based and identifying gaps in the research will be useful within the context of the literature review.

### **2.7.1 Discrimination Against Women**

Stereotyping, a cognitive process associating traits with specific groups, extends beyond individual cognition to societal and ideological implications. This process can lead to emotive reactions, such as biased selection or unfair payment of wages, towards individuals from targeted groups (Allport, 1954; Link, 2001). Group conceptions serve as social or ideological representations, reinforcing existing social connections in society (Augoustinos & Walker, 1998). In the context of the gig environment, stereotyping manifests in selective hiring practices and unequal payment for women, hindering their involvement in gig work

Based on selection bias, employers in Western digital careers may choose to promote and recruit selectively, skewing the candidate pool to favour specific individuals (Galperin, 2021). Additionally, Vyas (2021) claims that male-dominated occupations feature more stereotypically masculine language in their job advertisements than female-dominated occupations. For example, ‘competitive’, ‘confident’, ‘decisive’, ‘leader’ and ‘self-sufficient’ are stereotypically male words, whereas ‘committed’, ‘dependable’, ‘empathetic’, ‘nurturing’, ‘responsive’ and ‘understanding’ are stereotypically female words – and not qualities that search firms and human resource departments associate with the highest paying positions (Cahn et al., 2020). According to Galperin (2021), a Spanish study on the gig work environment showed that women were much less likely than equally qualified male candidates to be hired for male-typed jobs (e.g. software development) but significantly more likely to be employed for female-typed work (e.g. writing and translation). Furthermore, profile pictures can also play a major role in the hiring of gig workers. Some researchers have discovered gender prejudice on online platforms like Handy and TaskRabbit, which feature gig workers’ photos (Ravenelle, 2019). As a result, women can be negatively affected on all levels when performing gig jobs (Milkman et al., 2021).

Regarding pay discrimination, current labour data on the gender pay gap shows that ‘women earn nearly 16 percent less per hour in the EU than men; in other words, women get 84 cents for every euro men earn’ (European Commission, 2022). Because women are perceived as less professional and able to do the work, they receive non-competitive bidding, given their insufficient negotiating power (Vyas, 2021). As empirical research found on a pool of gig workers in the US, women are also paid significantly less than men due to years of experience and the nature of work (Churchill & Craig, 2019). Thus, academic evidence contradicts the expectation that gig work will reduce discrimination against women (Foong et al., 2018; MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019; Piasna & Drahokoupil, 2017; Cook et al., 2021). As Hunt and Samman (2019) concluded, ‘While the gig economy exhibits some new features, on the whole, it represents the continuation (and in some cases deepening) of longstanding structural, and gendered, inequalities’ (p. 1).

Although these studies examined members of liberal Western societies, the argument may be even stronger in conservative religious societies such as Saudi society. Women in this context are unlikely to be hired for any job due to prejudice or discrimination. The case of Saudi culture is unique because men rarely receive services from women in a professional workplace. Western women may challenge these stereotypes because of feminist theorists’ observations regarding work-life balance. However, Saudi women are new to the professional world; more observation is needed, and certain precautions must be taken, given that a deep understanding of women’s experiences is required to provide a compelling argument about this novel community.

### **2.7.2 Career Challenge**

Career challenges are a controversial topic among researchers. For this study, two competing theories are highlighted. The first one is the career preference theory, which explains women’s

preferences between jobs and household work (Hakim, 2002). According to this theory, women prefer certain employment features, particularly family-friendly workplaces, due to gender differences in attitudes and demands. However, Hakim's theory has drawn criticism for underestimating structural constraints, such as childcare responsibilities and workplace inequalities, that shape women's employment choices (Kan, 2005). This has made the theory particularly contentious among scholars who emphasise the role of institutional and societal barriers over individual preferences. Kaufman and White's (2015) research supported this tendency. They surveyed 1,986 individuals in Sweden to understand the impact of gender roles on job attribute preferences. The results revealed that Swedish women who adhere to traditional gender roles preferred family-friendly workplace policies, including parental leave, part-time work, shift work, and overtime, more than men.

Another study conducted by Major et al. (2013) examined the predictors of organisational and occupational commitments in the information technology (IT) sector by surveying 1,229 IT professionals. Their findings indicated that women rated work-family cultures higher than men as a predictor of their occupational commitment, contributing to the underrepresentation of women in IT and similar prestigious and time-demanding jobs. Women's preference for family-friendly professions explains their dominance and underrepresentation in specific jobs that value or devalue such attributes. Consequently, women may be more inclined to prefer gig work over full-time professional jobs due to the flexibility and work-life balance it offers.

The second theory is the career development theory, which examines the role of professionals in helping and achieving their career goals as they attempt to adjust to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hughes & Niu, 2021). Per this theory, individuals optimise their decisions and activities to advance their professional growth, career trajectory and overall job satisfaction. Following this argument, various studies state that gig work might be a good source of secondary income but not the preferred career path (Ashford et al., 2018). Therefore,

in their review paper on gig work, Ashford et al. (2018) emphasised that one of the key challenges facing gig workers is uncertainty about their career path.

Therefore, it may be argued that some women in the West do not prefer gig work because it does not offer specific and clear career prospects. The case of SA is expected to align more with the career preference theory due to its conservative nature. However, because of the changing dynamics of labour markets and the government's efforts to empower women, there may be a shift in this regard (Alessa et al., 2022). Currently, Saudi media efforts are aimed at institutionalising careers for women and promoting their independence (Ahmad, 2011). This marks the first time in modern history that the royal family and the government seem to be interested in changing societal and cultural values to empower women to have careers and be more independent. This contextual factor of the newness of women in the labour market and the societal transition from conservative to liberal has not been investigated in the literature on gig work.

### **2.7.3 Isolation**

One research project used Hughes et al.'s (2004) three-item loneliness measure to ask respondents about how often they felt left out, disconnected from others, and lonely in the previous week. Out of the respondents surveyed, one answered never, and four said often (Caza et al., 2021). Professionally, being disconnected from others can affect workers negatively on all levels. For example, gig workers in Western societies have discovered that teleworkers' views of professional isolation have a detrimental influence on job performance (Golden et al., 2008). Supervisors in traditional firms are not only responsible for ensuring high-quality performance but are also expected to stimulate employees and provide social and professional support (Jabagi et al., 2019). However, Kuhn and Maleki (2017) argue that gig workers lack a professional and responsible supervisor, which can contribute to their sense of loneliness, with



a negative impact on job happiness, organisational commitment, job performance, and contextual efficiency (Chiaburu et al., 2014). Therefore, as reported by Glavin et al. (2021), professional freelancers are typically acutely conscious of the social isolation entailed by their profession and intentionally seek out healthy habits and workspaces that allow for social engagement.

Based on the existing literature, social isolation emerges as a significant challenge for gig workers. Operating on virtual platforms, gig workers often experience physical separation (Watson et al., 2021). According to a recent survey, more than 50% of self-employed people experience feelings of loneliness and isolation (Deloitte, 2016). Consequently, negative mental well-being is anticipated due to the lack of interaction. Increased independence can exacerbate these feelings, potentially leading to depression if not adequately addressed (Ashford et al., 2018). Doucette and Bradford (2019) also highlight the heightened vulnerability of workers who experience loneliness and mental health issues. Gig workers often face psychological difficulties, including anxiety, despair, and unfavourable views towards their jobs (Probst, 2003; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Quesnel-Vallée et al., 2010; Shoss, 2017). Moreover, the physical separation inherent in gig work not only impacts mental health but also strains personal and family relationships (Rowlands & Handy, 2012).

Taking this into account, strong familial ties and Islamic principles inherent to the SA environment encourage entrepreneurial behaviour (Alrubaishi et al., 2021). When engaging in gig work, Saudi women consider their family's social isolation, reputation, and well-being. In SA, 'business is viewed as a way to enhance a family's social standing rather than as an impersonal, wealth-generating, market-driven activity' (Davis et al., 2000, p. 217). Therefore, the argument may be more compelling and convincing in strict religious cultures such as SA. Unlike Western cultures, SA is marked by a significant emphasis on collectivism, with non-kin interactions given less importance than familial and tribal bonds (Ramlall et al., 2012). This

contextual issue of loneliness and a lack of labour market competitiveness has yet to be addressed in the research on gig employment.

#### **2.7.4 Lower Income**

Despite the benefits of gig labour, gig workers, particularly women, encounter several risks, such as lower salaries and other forms of gender discrimination (Balaram et al., 2017; Codagnone et al., 2016). For example, an online poll of 955 platform-based food delivery employees revealed that female respondents reported average hourly wages of US \$12.92, while males reported earnings of US \$14.38 (Milkman et al., 2021). According to Vyas (2021), one of the many reasons why women are paid less than men is their inferior negotiating skills. The literature on women and negotiations highlights a considerable difference between men and women in their inclination to bargain for pay, as well as lower income expectations among women to avoid negotiation (Barzilay & Ben-David, 2017). For this reason, advertising higher hourly rates may place Western women at a disadvantage because it frees them of the expectation of securing higher pay through negotiation, which ultimately works against them (Exley et al., 2016).

Women are drawn to gig labour precisely because it allows them to prioritise their dedication to their children, families, and communities, which most other types of employment do not allow (Milkman et al., 2021). While these studies were conducted in liberal Western countries, the argument may be more appealing in conservative religious nations such as SA. In patriarchal Saudi society, the husband is still regarded as the breadwinner and is in charge of the household's finances (Yavas et al., 1994). Under these circumstances, Saudi women may be less motivated to accept lower wages due to the influence of Saudi culture on various aspects of family enterprises, including human resource strategies, values, and governance structures

(Krueger et al., 2021; Samara, 2021). Therefore, further research is needed to conclusively determine whether a lower income is considered a demotivational factor for Saudi women.

### **2.7.5 The Myth of Flexibility**

Individuals with a high level of cognitive flexibility demonstrate adaptability in the face of frequent work adjustments (Chong & Leong, 2017) and possess the ability to use inventive and distinctive strategies to manage professional requirements (Hirt et al., 2008; Steffens et al., 2016). Considering the correlation between the intricacy and adaptability of an individual's identity and heightened levels of creativity and resourcefulness (Gaither et al., 2015; Steffens et al., 2016), it is probable that individuals' self-perception strongly impacts their behaviour. From a perspective of job flexibility, the platform economy offers substantial advantages to women (Barzilay & Ben-David, 2017). However, this might push women to choose flexibility over stability. For example, for some women, working from home is seen as a positive, but it can also have drawbacks, including the potential for a lower salary and the frequent need to extend one's working hours (Lehdonvirta, 2018). Lehdonvirta (2018) argues that since the 1980s, the implementation of teleworking technology and flexible work schedules has resulted in various unanticipated effects, such as increased worker flexibility causing uncertainty and hindering planning (Lambert et al., 2012; Hyman et al., 2005).

In addition to uncertainty, not only are low wages and inadequate social security concerning to critics (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020), but gig workers also need proper boundary management abilities to effectively balance their conflicting life demands (Bricka & Schroeder, 2019). Despite the supposed 'flexibility' of the platform environment, some gig workers ultimately become dissatisfied with their work or undertake assignments unwillingly (Stewart et al., 2020). In other words, the capacity of gig workers to transform this potential into practical flexibility has frequently been hampered by a lack of cheap alternatives to places of

employment (Wood et al., 2019). Therefore, while gig workers appreciate some aspects of flexible working, new research on the gig economy indicates that such flexibility remains a myth for most workers (Wood et al., 2019). This ‘flexibility’, which shifts economic insecurity and risk to workers, has been the main point of criticism of platform labour (De Stefano, 2015; Lloyd, 2017). To summarise, workers must have a high level of proficiency to manage their work-life balance efficiently, and some workers are not proficient in using these online platforms (Heiland, 2021).

Although most Western female gig workers choose this work for its flexibility, Doucette and Bradford (2019) recently recorded an inexplicable decline in women’s incomes. Men were encouraged to spend more time at gig jobs to enhance their wages, but women were pushed by job uncertainty to prioritise flexibility over stability (Doucette & Bradford, 2019). This acknowledges the complex nature of gig work outcomes, as numerous factors shape the consequences of women’s choices. Stress, uncertainty, and financial worries are among the outcomes for Western women, which vary from study to study. However, the case of Saudi women is unique and remains unclear. Making judgments about gig labour as a flexible employment option and its connection to various outcomes is difficult. Hence, further research is needed to investigate how conservative societies differ from liberal societies in their approach to gig work.

#### **2.7.6 Educational Position and Job Advancement**

Because some women are inadequately represented in the labour market and often find themselves in low-paying jobs despite their good education (Crenshaw, 2021), education is no longer a major priority – a trend that has been reinforced by the rise in work options on digital platforms (Vyas, 2021). Younger generations’ transition from college to the workforce is becoming more unpredictable in the gig economy due to the fading link between human capital

investment and employment outcomes (Churchill et al., 2019). Therefore, Churchill et al. also remark that young women are optimistic about their opportunities in the gig economy and believe that educational achievements do not always benefit them in today's labour environment. Australian women, for example, have consistently failed to convert their increasing university degree dominance into job parity with men despite excellent rates of educational accomplishment (Chesters, 2019). As a result, gig work provides a solution to the lack of performance flexibility while maintaining established standards for childcare and housekeeping (Churchill & Craig, 2019). However, to address these issues, lifelong learning, a constructive collaboration between education and industry, and acknowledgment of past learning and abilities must be prioritised (De Ruyter et al., 2018).

A cross-regional survey and face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 107 employees from six countries revealed that the quality of national educational systems is crucial in influencing the quantity of revenue that remote gig workers earn (Wood et al., 2019). The lack of regulations regarding the interface between education and gig work exacerbates the situation. For example, young women with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics frequently apply for online jobs that require significantly less formal education (Galperin, 2021). Americans face greater pressure to balance caregiving responsibilities with paid labour; however, educational attainment does not have a significant influence on this balance (Gerber, 2022). A quantitative survey conducted in the United States and Germany revealed that although women and men had similar levels of education, women were more likely to have childcare and other responsibilities (Gerber, 2022). Consequently, Western women may feel compelled to engage in gig work to meet their basic needs because continuing their education may not seem feasible, particularly if they anticipate leaving these online platforms (Cameron et al., 2021).

Besides education, other factors present challenges for women in the gig economy compared to traditional jobs. While gig work is often financially cheaper to secure than standard employment, it lacks essential benefits like health insurance or retirement plans (Doucette & Bradford, 2019). Consequently, scholars have noted that as gig work becomes the primary employment option for many, the responsibility for securing benefits shifts from firms to individuals. When individuals must personally secure health insurance, satisfaction levels tend to decrease. This is because individual insurance markets often underperform compared to group markets, where risks are shared (Doucette & Bradford, 2019). The availability of health insurance can significantly impact a worker's well-being (Davis & Hoyt, 2020). Gig workers, typically classified as contractual employees, do not enjoy the full range of benefits afforded to full-time employees, such as health and retirement benefits, medical leave, regular wage increases, and job stability (Behl et al., 2021).

Research has shown that the positive outlook surrounding gig work primarily benefits a select group of highly educated and skilled individuals (Zeitz et al., 2009). For women with lower levels of education, gig labour is often perceived as challenging because employers frequently fail to provide both psychological support and tangible resources (Zeitz et al., 2009; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Inkson et al., 2012). Participation in gig platforms necessitates a specific skill set, with many of these roles falling under the category of high-performance work systems (HPWS) (Behl et al., 2021). Consequently, gig workers must often outperform traditional employees to be considered for future assignments on the platform that aligns with their skill set (Fabi et al., 2015). Additionally, survey data indicates that male gig workers tend to be older and more educated compared to their female counterparts (Churchill & Craig, 2019). Furthermore, studies have shown that while women are drawn to gig work for its perceived family-friendly nature, men tend to receive higher ratings in online feedback systems,

suggesting potential disparities in performance evaluations (Foley et al., 2018; Ashford et al., 2018).

While the gig economy is flourishing and the labour market is becoming increasingly competitive, it's essential for employers to prepare their current workforce for future challenges by providing them with new skills (Balakrishnan, 2022). Despite the availability of country-specific data on working conditions in platform-based work (Bales et al., 2018; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Veen et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2019), the understanding of how employment standards are affected remains limited. Western women may encounter additional hurdles as the incentives to acquire new skills diminish with the expansion of the gig economy (Galperin, 2021). However, applying the same rationale to Saudi women, with a focus on educational, cultural, and institutional factors, could yield different outcomes. Therefore, further investigation is necessary to fully grasp the experiences of conservative women in the gig labour setting, given the dearth of studies on the impact of gig work on Saudi women.

### **2.7.7 Dealing with Customers**

Previous studies have shown that gig workers are more likely to sabotage their service if they are treated poorly by customers (Xiongtao et al., 2021). Gig employees are often subjected to impolite, humiliating, inappropriate, or hostile customer treatment during service exchanges (Zhan et al., 2016). Such treatment can cause women to react negatively. Recent studies have called for more investigation into the organisational behaviour of gig workers (Guillaume et al., 2019). Unlike full-time employees, gig workers manage their own career growth and working relationships using the numerous platforms available to them (Samarra et al., 2013). In line with this idea, Xiongtao et al. (2021) contend that the platform finds it difficult to impose direct control on the behaviour of gig workers. Consequently, when exposed to unfavourable customer service, gig workers may behave with greater autonomy (Xiongtao et al., 2021).

Additionally, Wang et al. (2013) found that customer treatment can significantly influence an individual's mood, according to cognitive rumination theories. When people experience poor customer service, they may begin to question the value and significance of their profession (Loi et al., 2018). Illogical and inappropriate customer behaviour is an inevitable aspect of gig work, despite workers' efforts to mitigate it (Harris & Ogbonna, 2006). Consequently, being treated poorly by clients diminishes gig workers' self-perceived value, jeopardising their sense of identity and diminishing the meaningfulness of their work (Park & Kim, 2020; Wang et al., 2011). In their interactions with clients, gig workers allocate their limited resources to ensure client satisfaction and appreciation (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). However, when confronted with customer abuse, gig workers find that their efforts fail to yield the expected returns, leading to a decline in both the perceived value of their work and their sense of fulfilment (Xiongtao et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, a study conducted by BetterPlace reveals that women are accepted by customers (Mehta, 2020) but are also subject to strict levels of control through client assessment (Healy et al., 2017), with few options to question or reject performance rankings (Pangrazio et al., 2021). Without laws, the new work ethic emerging from the gig economy may once again place women at a disadvantage (Mehta, 2020). Newlands (2021) emphasises that algorithmic labour ignores specific constraints that are normally beyond workers' control (e.g. weather or traffic conditions). As a result, workers are exposed to highly dubious and unstable situations where they risk being abruptly fired or 'deactivated' from platforms if problems arise or clients submit complaints, which puts them on constant high alert (Duggan et al., 2021).

In the online gig economy, platforms possess the unilateral authority to modify the terms and conditions of women's engagements at their discretion (Norlander et al., 2021). This uncertainty significantly influences how female gig workers conduct their work, especially considering their eagerness to avoid receiving low client satisfaction ratings (Goods et al.,



2019). However, the consequences of this uncertainty may vary within conservative societies like SA. Thus, it is necessary to explore how Saudi women's social and economic circumstances affect whether they feel empowered in the online labour market (Alshmary et al., 2021). Knowledge about complaint behaviour in a Western cultural setting may not be transferable to non-Western societies, as highlighted by Liu and McClure (2001). Therefore, considering this, placing the sentence about knowledge before the previous one can enhance the thematic and logical progression of the passage.

## **2.8 Ride-Hailing Services in Saudi Arabia**

The decision to narrow the focus of this research to ride-hailing services facilitated through mobile applications, following an exhaustive review of the literature on gig employment and pivotal business developments in SA, is underpinned by several key factors. Primarily, the contemporary landscape of transportation has been fundamentally reshaped by the advent of on-demand ride services, typified by platforms such as Uber's mobile application, which effectively harnesses underutilised resources such as private vehicles (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Imam, 2022). This transformative mode of transportation has witnessed an unprecedented surge in popularity (Bartel et al., 2019), with on-demand transportation and ride-sharing services now ubiquitous in major cities worldwide, offering clients seamless access to rides around the clock (Gupta et al., 2019). For instance, the substantial proliferation of ride-share licenses in urban centres like New York City and Toronto evidences the widespread adoption of such services (Fitzsimmons, 2018; Powell, 2017). Despite the burgeoning prevalence of ride-sharing services, research into this domain remains relatively scant and mainly centred on individual perspectives concerning environmental consciousness and safety apprehensions (Wang et al., 2019, 2020). Moreover, the dearth of empirical investigations into the factors influencing the adoption of gig labour by Saudi women in the unique socio-economic milieu of SA represents a notable research gap. Therefore, this research seeks to

address this gap by empirically examining and contrasting the determinants shaping Saudi women's adoption of ride-hailing services as a form of gig employment, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of this new phenomenon in the SA context.

In addition to the global success of ride-hailing services, the decision to focus specifically on ride-hailing apps stems from the research's novelty and potential to shed light on Saudi women's empowerment in the workforce. Historically, Saudi women have predominantly relied on family members for transportation (Wheeler, 2020). However, a significant shift occurred in September 2017 when a royal decree granted women the right to obtain driver's licenses, effective from June 2018 (Saleh & Malibari, 2021). This historic decision marked a departure from decades of conservatism and paved the way for Saudi women to drive legally (Alghamdi et al., 2022). The introduction of ride-hailing services like Careem and Uber in SA in 2014 led to a remarkable uptake among women, with approximately 80% of initial customers being female (Saleh & Malibari, 2021). Subsequently, a 2018 Uber study revealed that nearly 31% of Saudi women expressed interest in driving as a means of earning income (BuildGreen, 2018). This evolving landscape underscores the transformative potential of ride-hailing services in empowering Saudi women economically and enhancing their participation in the workforce.

The emergence of the market for Saudi women providing ride-hailing services presents a promising avenue for examining the gig economy. Investigating this unique case may help enhance individual standards of living while also fostering economic growth at the organisational level. As highlighted by Gibbings and Taylor (2019), ride-hailing companies such as Uber are lauded as icons of innovation and deemed crucial for shaping the future of urban landscapes. Consequently, offering ride-hailing services as gig work may carry a prestige that could inspire emulation among business owners and stakeholders alike. The present exploration not only deepens the understanding of the gig economy's dynamics but also

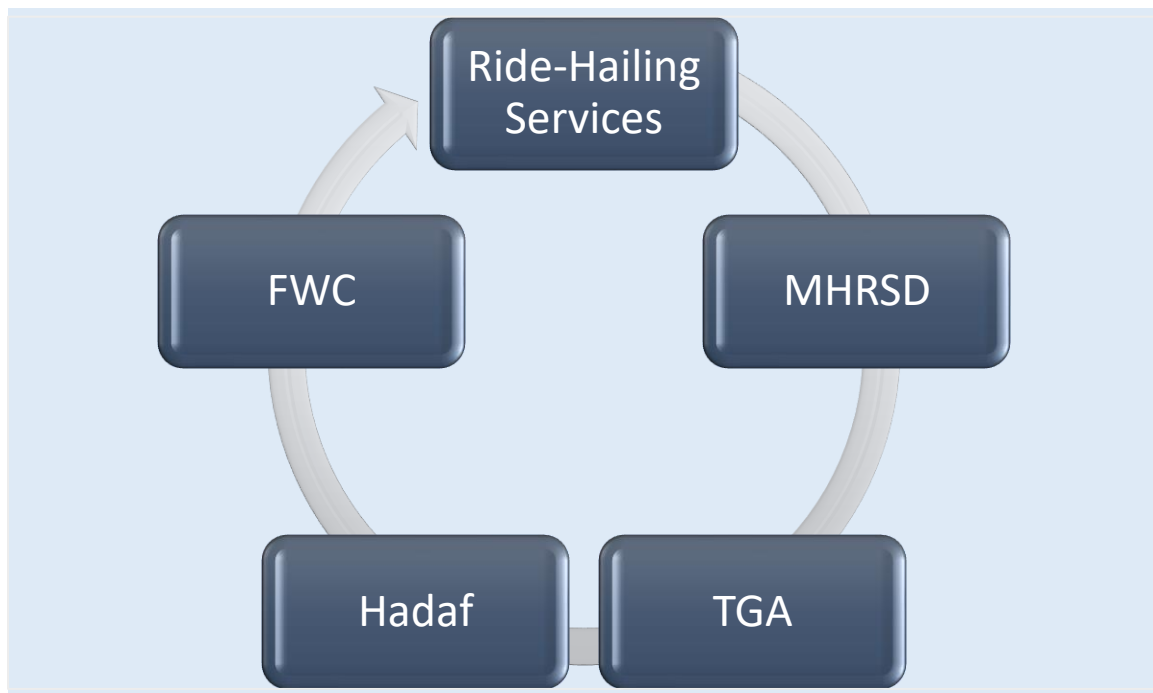
underscores its transformative impact on gender empowerment and economic participation in SA.

To adhere to the prevailing societal norms in SA, Uber introduced a novel option tailored to women drivers in the country, known as the ‘Women Preferred View’. This feature was implemented in response to its the app’s success and has been extended to accommodate female drivers in SA, allowing female passengers to opt for a preference to being paired preferentially with women drivers (BuildGreen, 2018). Women in SA are now empowered to drive and participate in ride-hailing applications like Uber, yet scholarly investigations in this area remain limited. Studies have explored the labour market dynamics of Uber drivers in various global contexts, including Egypt (Rizk, 2017), London (Berger et al., 2019), France (Landier et al., 2016), the United States (Hall & Krueger, 2018) and Australia (Alexander et al., 2022). However, none of these studies offer insights into the specific experiences of Saudi women drivers in the ride-hailing service sector.

A third salient consideration is the proactive role of the Saudi government in promoting and regulating ride-hailing services, which has significantly contributed to their exponential rise in popularity. At the governmental level, there has been a concerted effort to endorse the utilisation of ride-hailing services as a viable career path, particularly for individuals inclined towards non-traditional transportation methods (Freelance, n.d.). According to Freelance (n.d.), a financial support programme has been instituted for drivers meeting specific criteria aimed at facilitating their entry into entrepreneurial endeavours in the transportation sector. This self-employment support programme targeting both existing and prospective full-time workers in this domain is a collaborative initiative between the MHRSD, the TGA, the Human Resources

Development Fund (Hadaf)<sup>2</sup> and the FWC (see Figure 3). This multifaceted partnership exemplifies the concerted efforts of various governmental entities towards fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing economic opportunities in the ride-hailing sector, thereby facilitating the integration of individuals into the gig economy landscape in SA.

**Figure 3:** Structure of gig work management in SA



At the governmental level, the Saudi government has implemented regulatory measures to ensure equitable competition and uphold service standards in the ride-hailing sector. As per the TGA (n.d.), there are over 40 licensed applications facilitating passenger transportation (see Figure 4). Notably, the self-employment support programme covers approximately 18 of these applications listed as ride-hailing companies. Furthermore, the government has demonstrated a collaborative stance with ride-hailing enterprises to address operational challenges, cultivating an environment that is mutually beneficial to drivers and passengers alike.

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<sup>2</sup> Hadaf is an online service initiative introduced by the Saudi Arabian government through the Human Resources Development Fund. Its primary goals include boosting employment prospects, offering training programmes, and encouraging freelance work across the Kingdom (Human Resources Development Fund, 2024)

Collectively, the public endorsement of ride-hailing services by the Saudi government influences their popularity and profitability significantly, instilling consumer confidence, reliability and convenience. Consequently, there is a need to delve deeper into the quality of employment offered by these services and elucidate the experiences of women drivers beyond mere empowerment narratives. This requires a nuanced examination of the socio-economic implications and lived realities associated with participation in the ride-hailing workforce, underscoring the importance of broadening the discourse beyond surface-level empowerment rhetoric.

**Figure 4:** *Authorized ride-hailing companies operating in SA*

Transport General Authority	
Some licensed applications	
1-	Welcome
2-	Girl Captain
3-	Nawaaem
4-	Uber
5-	Let's Go
6-	Leenah
7-	Sair
8-	Jeeny
9-	Bolt
10-	Wsslini
11-	Kaiian
12-	Kareem
13-	Muhra
14-	AMNUH
15-	Hustle
16-	Azooz
17-	Noor
18-	Caberz
19-	Zizoom

### 2.8.1 Ride-Hailing and Female Drivers

Lastly, it is imperative to recognise that ride-hailing services and their implications extend beyond mere standalone entities, distinguishing themselves on the spectrum of platform economies. Although extensive research exists on Uber in various national contexts, Saudi

women remain conspicuously absent from this discourse. Uber's ride-sharing services, on which millions rely worldwide, have rapidly gained prominence in recent years (Moon, 2015; Wirtz & Tang, 2016). Despite its widespread adoption and evident profitability, Uber has faced numerous criticisms, including reports of sexual harassment and discrimination against female drivers (García & Poggi, 2022). The experiences of female drivers in the ride-sharing industry illustrate the persistent challenges encountered by women in predominantly male-dominated workplaces. Notably, safety concerns, particularly during night-time operations, loom large among the myriad difficulties faced by female Uber drivers (Glöss et al., 2016; Giddy, 2019). Accordingly, Ajayi (2020) underscores the prevalent anxieties among women drivers regarding their safety, urging Uber to strengthen security measures for its workforce.

This highlights the pressing need for comprehensive research exploring the nuanced experiences of Saudi women in the ride-sharing sector and clarifying the multifaceted socio-economic dynamics and gender-specific challenges inherent in this domain. Furthermore, these adversities contribute to fostering an unwelcoming workplace environment, thereby dampening morale and hurting the productivity of female Uber drivers. Reports indicate that female drivers encounter numerous challenges, from financial constraints to harassment and threats of physical violence (De Gioia Carabellese & Della Giustina, 2022). Several factors contribute to the gender wage gap in the ride-sharing industry, presenting additional hurdles for female drivers. These factors include differences in driving behaviours, vehicle preferences and a tendency among women to accept fewer trips during peak hours.

Moreover, female drivers contend with discrimination manifested in lower ratings and tips from passengers and stemming from pervasive gender biases. Given these challenges, there is a pressing need for comprehensive research on the experiences of women drivers in the ride-sharing sector and for viable solutions. In this regard, the proposed study adopts a theoretical framework integrating biosocial construction and Indigenous institutional theoretical

frameworks, as explained in Chapter 3, to offer a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic dynamics shaping the experiences of female drivers in the SAra context. Through such an interdisciplinary approach, the study endeavours to not only delineate the systemic challenges but also propose actionable strategies for addressing underlying disparities and fostering a more equitable and inclusive environment in the ride-hailing industry.

In non-Saudi Arabian cultures, research indicates a notable underrepresentation of female drivers in ride-hailing services like Uber (Berger et al., 2018). Scholars posit that this phenomenon stems from industry perceptions that predominantly portray driving as ‘entrepreneurial male labour’ (Ticona et al., 2018). Despite the potential benefits offered by on-demand ride-hailing platforms, such as autonomy in scheduling, flexibility and freedom (Tang et al., 2021), participation in this sector has predominantly been male-dominated thus far (Min & Bansal, 2023). In this section, the primary focus is on elucidating key themes extracted from the existing literature on female drivers in Western contexts. After the comprehensive exploration of push and pull factors influencing women’s engagement in gig work earlier in this chapter, the discussion focuses on articulating the experiences and perceptions of Western women specifically in the ride-hailing domain. Notably, it is crucial to acknowledge that on-demand transportation platforms may have different implications for women and for men, influenced by various contextual factors, including those examined below.

#### *2.8.1.1 Sexual Assaults*

Ride-hailing, a service that connects passengers with drivers via their smartphones, is becoming more popular, but its effects on social justice remain unclear (Tarife, 2017; Brown, 2019). Especially for women, the current circumstances show that female consumers are in greater danger as a result of their active involvement in this market. For example, male users have been accused of sexually assaulting, raping, and even killing female users (both riders and drivers), and these allegations have been widely reported (Tang et al., 2021). In 2017 and

2018, respectively, Uber recorded 2,936 and 3,045 cases of sexual assault against female riders (Conger, 2019). In a poll conducted in six countries, 64% of female drivers cited safety concerns as a major deterrent to joining Uber (IFC, 2018). These sexual assaults have increased the level of worry in Western societies over the safety of female users of ride-hailing systems (Fong, 2019).

Even though ride-hailing has grown significantly worldwide (Scholl et al., 2021), women still need processes safeguarding their safety to continue their rapid expansion. To meet the expectation, Uber implemented several prevention measures, including mandatory online anti-sexual violence training modules for drivers, improved safety functionality on its apps, a data-sharing system and an anonymising feature that prevents drivers from sharing passenger location information after a ride (Newcomer et al., 2019; Khosrowshahi, 2018; Duffy, 2021; Reuters, 2017). Nevertheless, new research on technology-facilitated gender-based violence demonstrates that Uber's efforts to combat sexual violence do not sufficiently address how technology is used to prevent sexual abuse (Dunn, 2021). Thus, if Uber does not adequately handle the issue of sexual assault, women in the West may rethink joining the company. This is particularly problematic given Uber's reluctance to acknowledge the significance of technology in its sexual violence prevention methods.

However, empirical data illustrating Saudi women's typical commuting experiences is not only lacking (Alshabibi, 2019) but may also differ from that of the West. All aspects of life in SA are informed by the beliefs, habits, and behaviours that make up the nation's culture, which are themselves shaped by the principles of Islam (Soekarba, 2019). In other words, Saudi men are concerned with maintaining the integrity of their families (Commins, 2012). Men and women thus only talk to one another in the rare cases when both members of a household have access to a Western education (Samovar et al., 2012). As a result, the assumption is that incidents of sexual harassment involving men and women unrelated to each other in Muslim communities,



notably in SA, are very uncommon, highlighting the societal emphasis on maintaining strict gender segregation (Alhabdan, 2015).

In Saudi culture, understanding a woman's place, particularly in public life, poses significant challenges, unlike in Western cultures (Fierke & Jorgensen, 2001). One of the most established social conventions for Saudi Muslim women is that they must be under the care of a male guardian (Hamdan, 2005). The primary focus of the available literature has been on men's obligations to ensure the safety and security of women (Alhajri, 2020). Due to the lack of published studies, government records, and scarce statistics, women's abuse in SA remains an elusive topic (Tonnessen, 2016). Consequently, reliable data on the prevalence of sexual assault among Saudi women who drive for Uber is unavailable.

#### *2.8.1.2 Driving Skills*

The inequality in salary between men and women may be partially explained by driving speed. Although both sexes benefit equally from riding experience, men tend to build it up more rapidly than women (Cook et al., 2021). The statistics indicate that men are more likely to drive recklessly and exceed the speed limit compared to women (Rhodes & Pivik, 2011; Özkan & Lajunen, 2006; González-Iglesias et al., 2012). However, driving speed has a positive link with productivity, which is measured as the ratio of earnings to the total amount of time spent working (Min & Bansal, 2023). Consequently, males may earn more money because they are more likely to choose risky driving options, such as shorter routes with greater potential for speeding (Lin & Fang, 2022).

Nonetheless, slower driving has not proven particularly bad for Saudi women drivers. In fact, for Uber drivers, the rewards to speed net of expenses may become negative if the danger of being involved in an accident or receiving a speeding penalty is sufficiently high (Cook et al., 2021). Drivers who maintain a consistent pace in the middle of the road receive better reviews

from their passengers, indicating that there is a trade-off between speed and passenger safety (Athey et al., 2019). Customers who have a bad experience with an Uber driver may quickly register a complaint using the app, and the company will resolve the dispute after reviewing the relevant trip data (Liu et al., 2021). Hence, the existing literature indicates that passengers would rather drivers maintain an average pace than alternate drastically between slow and fast.

### *2.8.1.3 Risky Task*

Lyft and Uber provide late-night drivers with a unique set of advantages that encourage them to work during those hours (Kaltner, 2018). However, while this might initially suggest unlimited flexibility and freedom for Uber drivers, the findings of Malin and Chandler (2017) present a different perspective. According to their interviews with Pittsburgh area drivers, operating on Friday and Saturday evenings during peak bar hours exposes them to additional dangers. Among the 18 Pittsburgh Lyft/Uber drivers in the study, at least one woman only drove once during this period before giving up because she was ‘very afraid’ that she ‘was going to strike someone’ due to the many people walking and driving while intoxicated. Moreover, other research indicates that drunk individuals, young people, and night riders tend to give worse ratings (Chan & Humphreys, 2018), which consequently leads to women driving fewer hours per week than men (Lin & Fang, 2022).

Despite the growing popularity of Uber, many concerns about its impact on drivers remain unanswered, particularly regarding the risks and benefits they may face (Rogers, 2015). For women who drive for Uber, safety concerns are paramount, especially considering that some passengers may utilise ride-sharing services after consuming alcohol (Medina, 2017). Additionally, many women express unease about driving at night due to various factors, such as poor visibility caused by inadequate roadside lighting and reflective lane markers (García & Poggi, 2022; Lin & Fang, 2022). While these concerns may be valid in Western cultures, where the sale of alcoholic beverages is legal and carries associated risks, the same cannot necessarily

be assumed for SA. Therefore, further research is needed to assess the safety of Uber drivers at night in the unique cultural context of SA.

#### *2.8.1.4 Location*

Several factors, including location, may contribute to the persistent gender pay gap among Uber drivers. For instance, driving in unfamiliar communities poses a safety risk (Almoqbel & Wohn, 2019). Men are more inclined than women to drive in areas with higher crime rates and more bars, perceiving these locations as offering greater financial opportunities (Cook et al., 2021). Conversely, women tend to avoid such areas due to concerns about crime or encountering intoxicated drivers, prioritising their safety. Therefore, it has been proposed that all ride-hailing applications should allow drivers to share their current locations with the company for safety and security reasons.

There is a pressing need to assess the safety of Saudi women driving for ride-hailing applications in certain areas of SA. No research has been conducted on this topic since women were granted driver's licenses in SA in September 2017 (Al-Wathinani et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of Saudi women in gig work and examine the impact of ride-hailing initiatives and policies on empowering Saudi women. It is crucial to investigate how the new laws governing Saudi female ride-hailing drivers have influenced the participation of women in the industry and the prevalence of safety concerns and hazardous working environments within the gig workforce.

## **2.9 Cultural Dynamics of the Gig Economy**

This chapter examines how the gig economy operates in the West and other countries compared to SA. It then highlights its broader implications and explores polarised global perspectives before concluding with a focus on its unique implications within SA. The gig economy, characterised by flexible and short-term work arrangements, has become a global phenomenon

with far-reaching implications for labour markets and socio-cultural structures. Its rise has prompted polarised debates, particularly concerning its impacts on individuals and societies. While proponents argue that gig work promotes inclusion, empowerment, and innovation through enhanced access to employment opportunities and entrepreneurial models, critics contend it perpetuates precarity, exploitation, and socio-cultural disruption, particularly in contexts with weak regulatory frameworks. This section examines these polarised global views after contextualising the gig economy's application and unique challenges within SA, a nation undergoing profound social and economic transformation.

### **2.9.1 Polarised Global Views**

Globally, the gig economy has garnered both acclaim and criticism, reflecting diverse socio-cultural, economic, and regulatory contexts. Advocates highlight its potential to democratise labour markets by offering accessible economic opportunities, particularly for marginalised groups. For instance, Sundararajan (2017) emphasises that gig platforms like Uber and Lyft offer an innovative labour market structure that bypasses traditional barriers, enabling flexibility and supplementary income generation. Similarly, platforms in developing economies, such as Ola in India, are viewed as tools to promote entrepreneurship and financial independence (Chaudhary, 2020).

Conversely, critics argue that gig work exacerbates vulnerabilities. Scholz (2017) frames the gig economy as a 'platform capitalism' model, where worker autonomy is undermined by algorithmic control and reduced benefits. Workers frequently face job insecurity, low wages, and a lack of social protections, framing the gig economy as a 'dystopian'<sup>3</sup> construct

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'dystopian' refers to a society characterised by oppressive social control, inequality, and bleak prospects for individuals, often representing the antithesis of an ideal or utopian society (Claeys, 2016). In the context of the gig economy, it describes a labour market where workers face systemic disadvantages, including insecurity and lack of protections, which critics argue mirrors dystopian features.

(Bérastégui, 2021). In Paris, Uber's operations faced resistance, leading to widespread protests and regulatory bans due to its disruption of traditional taxi services and concerns over worker exploitation (Harsin, 2024). Similarly, safety issues for drivers and passengers have emerged in regions like Brazil, where lax regulations compromised the gig economy's functionality (Defossez, 2017). Female drivers in India also confront unique challenges, including cultural stigma and inadequate safety measures, underscoring the intersection of gender and socio-cultural barriers (Chaudhary, 2020).

Despite these concerns, Hunt and Machingura (2016) highlight how gig platforms have positively impacted women in patriarchal societies, providing them with flexible employment options that align with familial responsibilities. The polarisation extends to societal perceptions. In certain Western and other countries, discussions often centre on the exploitative nature of gig work and the erosion of labour rights. In contrast, gig platforms are framed as opportunities for economic empowerment in developing contexts, particularly for women navigating socio-cultural restrictions (Hunt & Samman, 2020). This duality underscores the need for region-specific analyses to balance the potential for inclusion with the risks of exploitation.

### **2.9.2 Saudi Arabia's Unique Context**

As discussed in this chapter, SA's adoption of the gig economy reflects its broader socio-economic transformation under Vision 2030, a national initiative aimed at diversifying the economy and empowering women (Awwad & Hamdan, 2023). Unlike nations such as France, where gig platforms like Uber face resistance due to concerns over labour rights and disruption to traditional taxi services (Martini, 2017), SA positions these platforms as strategic tools for modernisation and inclusion. The lifting of the driving ban on women in 2018 epitomises this shift, enabling women to participate in ride-hailing services and challenge entrenched gender

norms (Macias-Alonso et al., 2023). Additionally, platforms such as HungerStation have localised gig models that align with regional cultural sensitivities, ensuring broader acceptance among Saudi users (Ribes, 2024).

This reform has led to a significant rise in female workforce participation, surpassing Vision 2030's interim target of 30% by 2025 (General Authority for Statistics, n.d.; Callen, 2024). However, SA's approach may also face unintended consequences. Over-reliance on state-led initiatives could risk creating dependency rather than sustainable empowerment. For example, while the Vision 2030 framework promotes gig work as a stepping stone for economic inclusion, the absence of robust labour protections could expose workers to exploitation. Furthermore, while reforms such as easing guardianship laws and introducing safety measures signify progress, they may inadvertently reinforce cultural restrictions by framing women's inclusion within traditional roles rather than redefining them entirely.

In contrast to global criticisms of gig platforms for exploitation, gender inequalities, and absence of voice (Standing, 2021; Martindale et al., 2024; Martini, 2017), SA reimagines them as mechanisms for achieving economic diversification and gender inclusion. This strategic framing aligns gig work with Vision 2030's broader goals of fostering technological advancement, creating employment opportunities, and reducing dependency on oil revenues. By integrating Islamic ethical principles into operational practices, the Saudi gig economy may also establish models distinct from global platforms, prioritising fairness and worker well-being. These dynamics are summarised in Table 1, which provides a comprehensive overview of key themes in gig economy literature, and Table 2, which compares global trends with the distinctive aspects of SA's speculative context within this evolving framework.

**Table 1:** Summary table of key themes in gig economy literature

Aspect	Key Insights from Literature	Relevant References
Definition and Scope	Gig economy involves flexible, task-based, often digital work arrangements.	(De Stefano, 2015; Graham et al., 2017)
Precarity and Exploitation	Workers face low pay, job insecurity, lack of benefits, and exposure to algorithmic control.	(Huws et al., 2018; Wood et al., 2019; Joshi et al., 2024)
Gender Inclusion	Women are underrepresented due to cultural and familial restrictions but benefit from flexible opportunities.	(Standing, 2016; Chung, 2020; Dokuka et al., 2022)
Regulatory Challenges	Policies vary widely, with some countries supporting gig work and others imposing bans or restrictive regulations.	(Rauch & Schleicher, 2015; Prassl, 2018)
Cultural Contexts	Cultural norms significantly influence gig work adoption, especially in conservative or patriarchal societies.	(Hakim, 2006; Salman & Bakas, 2024)
Technological Mediation	Platforms enable work but create dependency, with workers at the mercy of ratings and algorithms.	(Graham et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019)
Economic Motivation	Gig work often supplements income but can also provide financial independence or fulfil specific personal needs.	(Kalleberg, 2011; Kuhn, 2016)
Societal Transformation	Incremental but meaningful shifts in societal roles, particularly in conservative or developing contexts.	(Hakim, 2006; Chung, 2020; Anwar, 2022)

**Table 2:** Comparison of global and SAra gig economy contexts

Aspect	Global Context	Saudi Context (Speculative)
Regulatory Environment	Mixed approaches, from supportive (e.g., US, India) to restrictive (e.g., Uber bans in France due to labour protests and safety concerns).	Vision 2030 reforms aim to integrate gig work into the economy while balancing worker protections, empowering women to participate in and benefit from this transformative change actively.
Cultural Norms	Traditional norms often limit women's participation (e.g., stigma against women drivers in India, Brazil), requiring significant societal shifts.	SA experiences rapid cultural shifts driven by Vision 2030, fostering greater gender inclusivity and easing restrictions on women's participation in the workforce and society.
Gender Inclusion	Progress slow and often limited by structural barriers and societal norms (e.g., gender pay gaps in the UK, cultural restrictions in Indonesia).	Policies such as providing financial support, offering freelance certification programmes, and promoting women-only platforms accelerate inclusion, empowering women to participate actively in the gig economy without traditional barriers.

<b>Economic Motivation</b>	Primarily income-driven but also influenced by flexibility and autonomy, particularly in developed economies (e.g., gig platforms in the UK and Canada).	Includes unique drivers like cultural fit and a sense of empowerment, as prioritised under Vision 2030 reforms.
<b>Societal Transformation</b>	Incremental changes in societal roles and gender equity, heavily influenced by technology and globalisation.	Structural transformation, with Vision 2030 fostering female empowerment and redefining workforce norms.
<b>Technology Adoption</b>	Platforms standardise operations, focusing on efficiency, flexibility, and global scalability (e.g., Uber's global platform strategy).	Platforms localise features to address cultural nuances (e.g., Uber introducing women-only ridesharing services), fostering social inclusion and providing culturally appropriate solutions.

The insights and comparisons outlined in the tables underscore the complexities of the gig economy within diverse socio-cultural contexts. These discussions form the foundation for the next chapter, which delves into the theoretical framework guiding this study. The following chapter, Chapter 3, explores how societal structures and policy frameworks shape Saudi women's participation in gig work, building on the global cultural dynamics and regulatory challenges highlighted here. It employs two key theoretical frameworks—Biosocial Construction Theory and Indigenous Institutional Theory—to critically examine female drivers' motivations, barriers, and experiences in SA. Chapter 3 also investigates how gig platforms navigate socio-cultural expectations, regulatory landscapes, and labour rights by integrating global perspectives with Saudi-specific dynamics. With Saudi female drivers as the central focus, the chapter proposes pathways for a sustainable and inclusive gig economy within the country's transformative socio-economic landscape.

## 2.10 Chapter Summary

In Western culture, women are empowered to work and required to contribute to the family budget, unlike in conservative Islamic societies such as SA. Research conducted in the West



indicates that women prefer gig work to more traditional types of jobs because it provides greater flexibility and a better work-life balance (Milkman et al., 2021; Churchill & Craig, 2019; Hunt & Samman, 2020; Duffy, 2016). Women can more readily align their career preferences with family needs and find a way to reconcile their work schedules with their family schedules (Charlesworth et al., 2011; Churchill & Craig, 2019). In addition, gig work can provide women with financial security, especially in the case of single mothers (Kwan, 2022). However, gig work is associated with challenges in Western societies, such as discrimination against women and the perpetuation of stereotypes, such as women being viewed as ‘weak’ and ‘incompetent’, which may result in their being paid significantly less than men (Behl et al., 2022; Galperin, 2021; Milkman et al., 2021). Gig work also seems to provide less space for women than men to grow and evolve in their careers (Galfalvi et al., 2020).

The SA context presents a stark contrast to Western societies, characterised by deeply ingrained conservative religious norms that historically discouraged women from participating in the workforce while men are traditionally regarded as the primary providers (Yakar, 2022). However, recent years have witnessed a notable shift, with the royal family and the government implementing institutional reforms aimed at empowering women. Yet, amidst these transformative changes, critical questions remain unanswered. How do women in SA perceive gig work? Do they see it as able to accommodate their domestic and familial obligations, or do they express a preference for more conventional forms of employment? With newfound empowerment to participate in the workforce, will men embrace women as equals in the workplace, or will perceptions of female incompetence persist? Addressing these questions requires further research to comprehensively capture women’s experiences with gig work in SA. In this context, the scope of the present study is tailored to elucidate these dynamics and

provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of women's employment in the SAra socio-cultural milieu.

In conclusion, the research issue explored in this study represents a significant contribution to the field, particularly in the SAra context where it remains largely unexamined. By employing a qualitative methodology encompassing interviews and documentation analysis, this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the nature of gig labour and its implications for women. Although gig work presents both opportunities and challenges for women, the existing literature predominantly focuses on delineating its nature or identifying the motivations behind gig employment, with limited attention paid to the experiences of women in this domain. Crucially, no prior studies have investigated these dynamics in the SAra context. Consequently, the present study fills a crucial gap by shedding light on the experiences of Saudi women in the gig work environment, offering valuable insights into their unique socio-economic dynamics and paving the way for future research in this burgeoning field. The next chapter describes the novel theoretical framework, recognising the pivotal role of theoretical frameworks in research. This framework serves as essential scaffolding, providing structure, context and guidance throughout the entire research process, from conceptualisation to the interpretation of findings.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for this study, employing Biosocial Construction Theory (BCT) and Indigenous Institutional Theory (IIT) to explore the socio-cultural and institutional factors influencing Saudi women's participation in ride-hailing services. These frameworks guide the research design, inform the development of interview questions, and underpin the interpretation of findings, ensuring alignment with existing knowledge and scholarly debates (Heale & Noble, 2019). While BCT and IIT provide a structured lens to examine societal expectations, individual agency, and institutional dynamics, the study adopts an inductive approach, with thematic analysis allowing themes to emerge organically from the data (see Subsection 4.3.1.2 for more details on the usage of the theoretical framework). This theoretical groundwork also is the essence of the efforts of previous discussions in Chapter 2, where themes such as work-life balance and adapting to or challenging social and environmental changes were explored in depth (Sections 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8). By integrating these theoretical and empirical dimensions, the study critically engages with the literature and contributes significant insights into Saudi women's participation in the gig economy.

BCT is particularly relevant for this study as it integrates biological and social factors to explain how gender roles are constructed, maintained, and adapted. This theory is instrumental in understanding how women's professional roles intersect with traditional expectations in SA, shedding light on challenges such as balancing work and family responsibilities. Similarly, IIT complements this by focusing on how institutional structures shape marginalised groups' experiences, offering a lens to examine the interplay between organisational policies and cultural norms in the gig economy. Together, these theories align well with the study's focus

on understanding the socio-cultural and institutional barriers faced by Saudi women. The following sections will delve deeper into each theory, providing a detailed exploration of BCT and IIT and their specific applications within this study.

### **3.2 Biosocial Construction Theory: Overview and Relevance**

BCT, developed by Wood and Eagly (2012), provides a comprehensive framework to explain how biological and social factors interact to shape gender roles and behaviours. Unlike theories that focus solely on biological determinants or social constructs, BCT integrates both, highlighting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of gender roles. The theory argues that gender norms are highly adaptable across historical periods, cultures, and ecological contexts. These norms emerge as societies adjust labour distribution to meet the environmental and social needs of their communities. For instance, Saudi women beginning to work as drivers in ride-hailing services exemplifies how individuals challenge entrenched cultural norms while contributing to the evolving dynamics of gender roles. By examining the reciprocal relationship between societal structures and individual behaviours, BCT provides a nuanced understanding of how gender roles evolve in response to changing circumstances.

At the heart of BCT are four interconnected elements that underpin the formation and maintenance of gender norms: divided labour, socialisation, cultural beliefs about gender, and the influence of gender roles on social behaviour, which will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter. Divided labour examines how tasks and roles are allocated based on physical and reproductive capacities, with these allocations evolving alongside socio-economic developments and varying power relationships between the sexes. Socialisation explores how children are guided into gendered roles through a combination of biological predispositions and cultural learning mechanisms, which shape their attitudes, behaviours, and expectations. Cultural beliefs about gender address how essentialist views about the sexes influence societal

expectations and stereotypes, which may reinforce or challenge traditional norms over time. Finally, gender roles shape social behaviour by guiding how individuals conform to or deviate from societal expectations, with psychological and biological processes working together to reinforce or reshape these norms.

This theory is particularly relevant to this study, as it provides a lens to explore the intersection of societal expectations, individual agency, and economic participation. In the context of SA, where traditional gender norms remain deeply entrenched, BCT offers valuable insights into how women navigate and challenge these norms while participating in ride-hailing services—a sector historically dominated by men. For instance, the theory helps explain how caregiving responsibilities and societal expectations around women's roles act as barriers to professional participation, while simultaneously highlighting how these barriers are being contested and redefined through participation in the gig economy. The rise of ride-sharing applications such as Uber has presented opportunities for women in the transportation industry, which has historically been dominated by men (Tarife, 2017). Despite efforts by companies, including Uber, to diversify their workforce, female drivers remain a minority (Berger et al., 2019).

In analysing the experiences of Saudi female drivers for ride-hailing services, BCT, as outlined by Wood and Eagly in their book chapter titled "Biosocial Construction of Sex Differences and Similarities in Behaviour," provides a pertinent theoretical framework (Wood & Eagly, 2012, pp. 55-123). Wood and Eagly argue that gender norms are highly adaptable across contexts, civilisations, and periods. This adaptability arises as individuals adjust their work distribution to meet the ecological and social needs of their communities. Gender segregation in occupations is rooted in the socialisation of boys and girls, combined with inherent differences in temperament, which contribute to the development of distinct personalities suited to expected adult roles. This theory offers insight into the complex interplay of social, cultural,

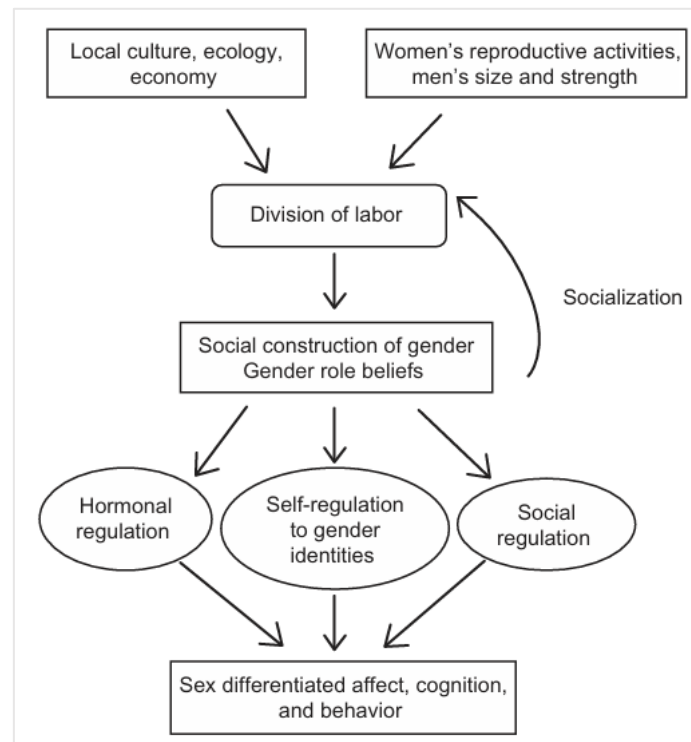
and biological factors shaping the experiences of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing industry.

Therefore, this study employs BCT to frame the research design, inform the development of interview questions, and guide data analysis. By focusing on the theory's key variables—divided labour, socialisation, cultural beliefs, and behavioural influences—this research examines how Saudi women negotiate traditional gender roles, manage caregiving responsibilities, and engage with economic opportunities. The following sections will provide a deeper exploration of BCT's key elements, incorporating Wood and Eagly's Figure 2.1 to visually represent the theory's framework and demonstrate how it is applied to this study's investigation of Saudi women's participation in the gig economy.

### **3.2.1 Visualising the Biosocial Construction Model**

Figure 2.1, presented by Wood and Eagly (2012) and referred to as Figure 5 in this thesis, provides a visual representation of the biosocial construction model, highlighting the dynamic interplay between distal and proximal factors in shaping gender roles and behaviours. At the centre of the model is the division of labour, which arises from the interaction of two primary influences: cultural, ecological, and economic conditions, as well as biological characteristics, such as women's reproductive activities and men's size and strength. These factors collectively influence the efficiency and suitability of specific tasks for each gender, shaping societal norms and expectations over time. In SA, these processes are evident in the strong cultural emphasis on women's roles as caregivers and men's dominance in public and professional spaces. However, as more Saudi women enter professions such as ride-hailing, they challenge and gradually reshape these traditional norms, creating new opportunities for broader societal transformation.

**Figure 5:** *The Biosocial Construction Model (Wood & Eagly, 2012, p. 58)*



The model situates the division of labour as a pivotal layer, mediating between distal causes (external influences) and proximal mechanisms (immediate behavioural processes). Distal causes, represented above the division of labour, include the cultural, ecological, and economic contexts that shape the societal organisation of labour. Below the division of labour are the proximal mechanisms, which illustrate how social and biological processes reinforce and stabilise these gendered practices. Gender role beliefs and the social construction of gender are informed by observations of the division of labour, creating shared societal expectations that are transmitted through socialisation. These beliefs interact with biological processes, such as hormonal regulation, and guide sex-differentiated behaviours, thoughts, and emotions. Together, these mechanisms provide a dynamic and feedback-driven understanding of how gender roles are perpetuated and adapted. This interplay of distal and proximal factors provides a nuanced understanding of how societal norms are shaped and contested. In the context of SA,

this framework illuminates the challenges women face as they negotiate evolving gender expectations through participation in the gig economy.

This study draws on Figure 5 to examine how Saudi women navigate the intersection of biological influences, societal norms, and gendered labour divisions. The figure provides a valuable lens to analyse the dynamic processes shaping women's participation in the ride-hailing industry within the context of SA. Specifically, the framework allows for an exploration of how broader societal structures, individual agency, and feedback loops interact to influence women's opportunities and challenges in the gig economy. One key element of Figure 5 is ecological and social structures, which, in the Saudi context, are shaped by initiatives such as Vision 2030. This national reform plan aims to increase women's participation in the workforce, thereby creating a shifting social structure that opens new economic opportunities. However, while such structural reforms are intended to encourage female economic engagement, deeply entrenched cultural norms continue to affect women's choices and access to certain professions. Ride-hailing, as a flexible and relatively new form of work, exemplifies this intersection, where structural changes coexist with societal resistance to altering traditional gender roles.

Another critical component is the division of labour, which is central to understanding the constraints faced by Saudi women in the ride-hailing industry. Despite the socio-economic changes promoted by Vision 2030, traditional caregiving roles and cultural perceptions of women's mobility outside the home still significantly limit their participation in the workforce. These roles often act as barriers to women's entry into male-dominated professions, such as driving. The persistent division of labour reflects how biological and societal factors collectively shape occupational segregation and reinforce gendered expectations.



Finally, the framework's emphasis on behavioural feedback captures how Saudi women's participation in ride-hailing services challenges and reshapes entrenched gender norms. By entering a profession historically dominated by men, female drivers provide new behavioural models that have the potential to disrupt traditional stereotypes. Their visibility and economic contributions influence societal perceptions of women's capabilities, creating a gradual shift in expectations and attitudes. In this way, Saudi women drivers embody the reciprocal feedback loop illustrated in Figure 5, actively contributing to the transformation of societal norms through their participation in the gig economy.

By incorporating this framework, the study captures the dynamic and reciprocal processes that shape gender roles in SA. It highlights how women balance traditional expectations with emerging opportunities, offering insights into the interplay of biological, social, and cultural factors that influence their experiences in the gig economy. Understanding these processes requires an in-depth exploration of the variables within the framework, including their individual roles and interconnections. Each of these variables will be explained in detail in the following sections to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gender roles are constructed and contested.

### **3.2.2 Divided Labour**

The social, cognitive, behavioural and physical variables contributing to the division of labour among humans have evolved independently throughout time, making it a phenomenon of great complexity (Mescouto et al., 2022). Because of their high level of intelligence and propensity for social interaction, humans can create complex networks of cooperation with their friends, family and neighbours (Richerson, 2013). It is believed that cultural innovations associated with hunting and extensive foraging gave birth to the division of labour between men and women, a hallmark of cooperative societies. The attachments between men and women have

partly enabled this sex-based division of labour (Keizer et al., 2019). These bonds encourage paternal investment, protection and coordinated task performance, such as food procurement and childcare. Humans' physical features govern their capacity to accomplish activities crucial to survival in various contexts. In particular, women's reproductive responsibilities limit their time for other pursuits, such as providing ride-hailing services as drivers. Boris (2019) argues that reproductive responsibilities make it difficult for women to engage in jobs that call for extended periods of concentrated effort or training or that require frequent or long-distance travel.

In traditional communities, this means that women prioritise activities like collecting food and cooking, which facilitate reproduction and childcare (Scelza & Hinde, 2019). On the contrary, men's physical attributes are more suited to strength-intensive activities such as hunting, clearing land and ploughing due to their larger stature, faster speed, greater muscle mass, enhanced oxygen transport capacity, and stronger upper-body musculature (Fors Connolly et al., 2020). According to Boris (2019), transportation is a field where males excel, while women are more likely to pursue specialisations that allow them to balance parenting responsibilities without sacrificing their professional development. Men are more likely to specialise in jobs that call for physical strength, whereas women are more inclined towards jobs that allow them to care for children but do not demand a high level of education or expertise. Thus, an intricate interaction between biological and cultural variables has resulted in the division of work among humans. In the context of SA, where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched, this concept of divided labour informed the development of interview questions that explore how Saudi women navigate the gendered division of labour in their work as drivers. Questions were designed to probe how responsibilities related to childcare and household duties impact their ability to engage in gig economy work.

BCT highlights how perceptions of biology shape societal behaviours and labour divisions. For instance, traditional views on women's reproductive roles often frame them as primary caregivers, which can limit their opportunities in professions perceived as physically demanding or requiring long hours (Wood & Eagly, 2012). In the Saudi context, these cultural perceptions amplify biological essentialism, further reinforcing gendered occupational segregation. Such societal constructs create significant barriers for women aspiring to enter male-dominated professions like ride-hailing services. The theory's emphasis on divided labour underscores the tensions between professional ambitions and familial responsibilities. Saudi women are often expected to prioritise caregiving and domestic roles, creating unique challenges in balancing their work within the gig economy with household duties. This perspective highlights how gendered societal expectations influence work-life balance.

#### *3.2.2.1 Division of Labour in Foraging Societies*

Wood and Eagly (2012) contend that local circumstances and physical features of reproduction and strength impact the division of labour in foraging communities, which may result in a wide range of differences in the duties undertaken by women and men. In general, men have the responsibility of hunting, while women are involved in gathering and collecting, but the prevailing natural circumstances influence the particular differentiations within each culture. Harvesting and crop tending, for example, may be performed by men in certain cultures and women in others. Women are often responsible for food provisioning in communities that depend on foraging for plants and small animals. Conversely, in communities that depend more intensively on hunting and fishing, men assume this responsibility. The elements that determine the allocation of work, such as the reproductive activities of women and the physical size and strength of men, converge with environmental conditions to create diverse divisions of labour among hunter-gatherer communities. This historical perspective on the division of labour was used to design questions that examine how contemporary Saudi women perceive their roles

within the gig work environment, particularly in relation to the traditional gender expectations that still prevail in their society.

### *3.2.2.2 Division of Labour with Socio-economic Development*

In today's increasingly complex and diversified societies, people can hone their talents via years of dedicated study and practice, becoming specialists in various fields (National Research Council, 2000). Men and women have traditionally divided work by focusing on separate and complementary sets of societal responsibilities (Wood & Eagly, 2012). This division of labour has enabled them to enjoy the advantages of their abilities in the context of the family and the community. While historically, women predominantly took care of home and children, and men focused on farming and the military, post-industrial civilisations have seen a shift. Both men and women now participate in paid work, and there has been a reduction in the constraints of reproduction on women. This change has facilitated some success in integrating women into formerly male-dominated fields, although men still predominate in blue-collar professions that previously relied on physical strength (Oluwaniyi, 2021). However, advancements in technology have diminished the necessity for physical strength in many types of labour, with most paid jobs now prioritising intelligence over physical prowess.

Historically, men have been the primary breadwinners in many cultures, while women were expected to stay home and care for children (Sear, 2021). In today's complex and diverse societies, however, more women are entering the labour market, where they encounter sexism and other barriers (King et al., 2012). In conservative and religious communities, women drivers challenge normative gender roles by adopting a male-dominated profession and engaging in out-of-the-home social interaction. To fully comprehend the lives of women working as drivers in conservative nations, it is essential to consider the intersection of their gender and culture (Sear, 2021). Women pursuing non-traditional professions may face particular obstacles due to societal and religious conventions that define gender roles and

expectations. As more women enter the workforce, they challenge these standards, contributing to economic and social progress. Interview questions were crafted to explore the intersection of socio-economic development and gender roles, aiming to understand how Saudi women reconcile their professional ambitions with traditional societal expectations.

### **3.2.3 Socialisation**

The activities that men and women commonly engage in vary greatly depending on the prevailing social and economic framework and regional conditions (Beneria & Sen, 1981). Societies create social roles that people perceive as conducive to their success, resulting in a wide range of perspectives and behaviours (Bavel et al., 2020). For instance, according to BCT, preparing children, both boys and girls, for adult duties is an integral part of these cultural processes. However, due to a lack of inherent predisposition, children require significant effort to prepare for these tasks. Children's behaviours, abilities, cognitive capacities, emotional dispositions, personality traits, and normative ideas are shaped by extensive socialisation processes conducted by parents, schools, and other adults. Through these experiences, most children learn to conform to the gender expectations of their communities (Wood & Eagly, 2012).

#### *3.2.3.1 Socialisation as a Biosocial Process*

Humans' innate abilities, such as imitating and participating in group instruction, are crucial to their social development. A child's development is aided by these inclinations when acquiring information and abilities relevant to their particular culture. Golding and Fitzgerald (2019) add that biological and developmental differences between boys and girls manifest in early childhood, with boys displaying a higher surgency associated with increased motor activity even in infancy. Boys are often less timid and more likely to engage in physical activity, make new friends, show strong emotions and experience intense pleasure (Auyeung et al., 2009;

Hines, 2009; Lindzey & Mize, 2001; Munroe & Romney, 2006; Wood & Eagly, 2012). Prenatal androgen exposure is thought to increase surgency in boys, promoting a desire for active play and toys. Engaging in vigorous physical play and participating in dynamic social interactions can support the development of a more assertive and confident self-identity in children. Conversely, research suggests that girls often exhibit stronger self-regulation skills, such as sustained attention and inhibitory control, which are critical factors in academic achievement.

It is believed that the androgenisation of male foetuses and other organisational effects of prenatal hormones on the brain contribute to observable variations in personality between boys and girls at a young age (Berenbaum et al., 2011; Hines, 2009, 2011). However, meta-analyses have not shown any consistent proof of gender disparities in cognition or brain structures, suggesting doubt about the existence of sex-specific neural structures caused by early androgen exposure (Brandes et al., 2020). Studies conducted on girls diagnosed with congenital adrenal hyperplasia, who are subjected to elevated amounts of androgens during pregnancy, frequently reveal notable disparities in their experiences when compared to other females. Studies have not consistently demonstrated sex differences in brain architecture and behaviours due to early androgen exposure or other biological variables (Ivan et al., 2022). Consequently, there remains much mystery surrounding the factors influencing the social experiences associated with a person's gender, which may not be solely determined by biological factors. This concept of biosocial socialisation was used to design interview questions that investigate how early life experiences and societal expectations shape Saudi women's career choices and behaviours. These questions aimed to uncover how the participants' upbringing influenced their perception of gender roles and their decision to enter the ride-hailing industry.

### 3.2.3.2 *Socialisation Mechanisms*

Research shows that girls are encouraged to be submissive in societies where women do not own resources or exercise much power (Bell, 2020). This points to a correlation between the socialisation pressures on girls and boys and the division of labour in society (Wood & Eagly, 2002). Moreover, in communities with productive activities that support patriarchy, there are more significant differences in the socialisation of girls and boys. Psychologists who study human development have pinpointed how adults' gendered interactions with children, including parents and teachers, help shape enduring gender norms. Although some evidence indicates that parents promote psychological differences between their sons and daughters, most research suggests that they focus on encouraging gender-typical activities. Yet, according to Bell (2020), studies examining specific behaviours, developmental windows, naturalistic settings and familial contexts have described sex-differentiated socialisation related to these traits. For example, parents tend to be more permissive with their boys and let them make more decisions, but they are more protective of and cautious about their girls, who are encouraged to take fewer risks in the physical realm.

According to Guhin et al. (2021), mechanisms for socialisation include forms of social learning enacted both consciously and subconsciously. For instance, children in foraging communities acquire culturally acceptable conduct by emulating and imitating their parents and other community members. Children of parents who are not firmly committed to gender equality or whose fathers are not actively engaged in childrearing are more likely to internalise and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. Moreover, gender norms and stereotypes may be transmitted via educational experiences and popular culture through media, contributing to the perpetuation of such attitudes. Gender norms and adult responsibilities are shaped by the social context in which people grow up (Stewart et al., 2021). Gender is constructed by close-by psychological and biological systems shaped by societal norms regarding gender roles.

In communities where gender roles are tightly defined by religion and conservatism (Nordvik, 2023), female drivers might encounter significant obstacles. Specifically, in these strict countries, characterised by deeply ingrained gender norms, considerable effort is invested in the socialisation process of children, shaping their habits, cognitive capacities, and personality traits (Ogbu, 2019). Girls are often encouraged to prioritise self-control and academic pursuits, while boys are pushed towards sports and building friendships. These gendered expectations mirror the division of labour within these societies, with women predominantly responsible for childcare and household chores. Consequently, societal conventions and the gendered expectations placed on women pose additional challenges for female drivers in these specific nations.

The mechanisms of socialisation discussed were employed to design interview questions that investigate how societal and familial expectations shape Saudi women's professional choices. These questions sought to explore the extent to which traditional gender norms are internalised and their impact on women's decisions to participate in the gig economy. Understanding gendered socialisation within conservative societies also informed the tailoring of questions that address the specific challenges faced by Saudi women in the ride-hailing industry. Special focus was placed on the influence of societal and religious expectations on their involvement in this sector.

#### **3.2.4 Cultural Beliefs About Gender**

Gender norms in culture are formed mainly through people's observations of how men and women behave in everyday life (Endendijk et al., 2018). Thus, the prevalent division of labour in culture influences these activities and, by extension, societal perceptions of female drivers. These beliefs, in turn, affect the socialisation of boys and girls. The correlation between the allocation of labour and gender perspectives is influenced by the principles of corresponding



inference, which posits that an individual's behaviour can be anticipated by their inherent characteristics (Giuliano, 2020). Cultural expressions like songs, legends and media representations elaborate on pre-existing gender norms developed when society members have similar conceptions of how men and women should behave.

Gender roles are essentially composed of psychological features that individuals infer from observable actions, providing a pan-situational framework for arranging social interaction (Eisend, 2019). Women are often stereotyped as nurturing and socially adept because they are expected to undertake more caregiving and community service work than men (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). While both men and women benefit from stereotypical concepts of communion and agency, women are particularly valued for their communication skills (Eagly et al., 2020). In patriarchal societies, many relatively lowly positions are filled by women of a particular personality type, which reinforces these gender stereotypes. Even in post-industrial civilisations, gender roles and expectations for men and women continue to reflect the division of work along traditional lines. As a result, women often rationalise staying in their prescribed social positions and within patriarchal societal systems (Wood & Eagly, 2012). This understanding of cultural beliefs about gender was utilised to develop interview questions aimed at investigating how societal perceptions influence Saudi women's experiences as drivers. The questions were designed to explore how cultural stereotypes and gender roles impact their work, including interactions with male customers and colleagues.

#### *3.2.4.1 Essentialism of Beliefs About the Sexes*

According to Wood and Eagly (2012), the essentialist viewpoint holds that inherent variations in human traits cause behavioural disparities between men and women. It is often believed that either social influences, such as socialisation, or biological ones, such as genetic endowment and hormonal processes, determine these characteristics. Categorising individuals as male or female implies beliefs about biology and nature. Although this may suggest that sex

categorisation is considered a natural product of sex chromosomes, it also entails that gender is the most extreme of natural categories (Ching & Wu, 2023). Children tend to concentrate on biological parts of essentialism, whereas adults have more flexible beliefs that incorporate both social and biological reasons. Despite the prevalence of biological and environmental factors, there is a prevailing understanding that the differences between men and women are largely attributed to the influence of their social environments.

Essentialist views of gender have been shown to harm both men and women (Kubota, 2020). These views often justify prejudice and sexism, such as the belief that women are less capable than men in specific disciplines. Consequently, women are frequently underpaid and denied access to higher-ranking positions in the workplace. For men, essentialist views impose pressure to conform to traditional masculine ideals, leading to stigma against those who do not. This stigma discourages men from seeking mental health treatment, contributing to higher rates of depression and suicide. Gülgöz et al. (2019) emphasise that essentialist gender ideas have harmful repercussions for both sexes. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the complex interplay between nature and nurture in shaping gender differences, particularly when addressing issues like the professional experiences of Saudi women drivers.

#### *3.2.4.2 Implications of Essentialist Beliefs*

According to theory, people can come to different conclusions regarding sex differences depending on their essentialist ideas about the roles of nature and nurture. Social essentialists acknowledge that social contexts substantially impact the determination of sex differences. If, for instance, there were less emphasis on gender roles in early development, sex disparities today would be different. People assume that personality traits and the cognitive capacities of men and women have converged over the past decades and will continue to do so in the coming decades, according to studies on dynamic stereotypes (Kiebel et al., 2020). These findings have

been linked to changes in the division of labour, with participants assuming that masculine attributes will converge as social roles become similar.

In addition, those who subscribe to the essentialist social perspective are more likely to endorse the notion that women's characteristics, such as nurturing and empathy, help them fulfil their expanded and more autonomous social duties. Research on the nature of changing stereotypes in various cultures has shown that individuals react differently to shifts in the division of work in different countries (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). However, when confronted with the prospect of societal change, essentialist ideas that invoke nature also impact how individuals think about sex disparities. Men are more inclined to accept biological explanations of sex differences when women are shown acquiring social prestige. Such views provide individuals with a solid basis for supporting the status quo of the social division of labour and encouraging the continuation of existing social divides. The implications of essentialist beliefs about gender were explored in interview questions that examined how these beliefs influence participants' career choices and experiences in the ride-hailing sector. Questions were crafted to reveal whether participants encountered bias rooted in these beliefs and how they responded to it.

#### *3.2.4.3 Actual Change in Gender Stereotypes*

According to social role theory, higher work rates for women should lead to more stereotyped agency; however, this trend has only been observed in certain cultural settings and in relation to particular characteristics, such as intellect (Schneider & Bos, 2019). Employment no longer conveys the same stereotypes as in earlier decades when it was less common for women. Instead, men and women are seen as equally competent in the workplace. The variety of women's roles has broadened stereotypes even though the overall substance of preconceptions about women has not changed. Some women have succeeded in male-dominated industries like management and the professional sphere, while others remain stuck in more stereotypically female positions like housework and community service. According to Standing (2022),

women experience a more comprehensive range of job statuses than men do, with a more significant number of women dealing with underemployment or unemployment. Consequently, the shift in women's professional and family responsibilities and the maintenance of other female roles contribute to the proliferation of preconceptions about women.

In contrast to male stereotypes, which tend to be more general, studies show that female stereotypes tend to be more precise and categorical. People who strongly emphasise social perception also tend to attribute feminine traits to men. This indicates that present social arrangements are justified because they reflect the distinct basic traits people believe exist between women and men. Both nature and nurture play a role in these essentialist views, giving people hope for the future while simultaneously functioning as a conservative influence by promoting the idea of a stricter class system (Wood & Eagly, 2012). In the end, gender roles are upheld by all community members via a combination of socialisation and common consensus. The exploration of changes in gender stereotypes was used to design questions that investigate whether Saudi women perceive shifts in societal attitudes toward their participation in traditionally male-dominated fields. These questions aimed to understand if and how changes in stereotypes have impacted their experiences in the gig economy.

Considering the discussion so far, it is easy to understand how gender stereotypes and expectations affect women's access to employment in a wide range of sectors, including ride-hailing services like Uber, especially in more conservative and religious countries. Despite women's increasing representation in the workforce, studies reveal that they are still stereotyped as more nurturing and collaborative, while men are perceived as more assertive and goal-oriented in post-industrial cultures (Olive et al., 2020). This bias affects the opportunities available to women, including leadership positions, as well as their standing among co-workers and clients. While some women have made it into traditionally male-dominated executive and professional roles, the majority still remain in socially demanding

occupations that may perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and restrict women's advancement.

These difficulties tend to be more severe in more traditional and religious societies. Cultural and social norms make it harder for women to leave the house and work or enter specific fields, such as getting jobs as drivers for companies like Uber. Moreover, women who work as drivers confront various obstacles and misconceptions in religiously and politically conservative societies. By challenging established gender standards, female drivers risk being stigmatised and rejected by their peers. Moreover, they can face hostility or prejudice from clients or co-workers holding stereotypical views about women's duties and talents (García & Poggi, 2022). Generally, the experiences of women who work as drivers in conservative and religious countries mirror the broader social and cultural expectations regarding gender roles and stereotypes.

### **3.2.5 Gender Roles Shape Social Behaviour**

Wood and Eagly (2012) argue that a strong correlation exists between what men and women believe about gender and how they act. Various biological and behavioural mechanisms are activated by these concepts and eventually take charge of influencing behaviour. These mechanisms are triggered by the allocation of tasks, which impacts the standards and socialisation about gender roles, while hormonal and other physiological pathways are also influenced. Bertrand (2020) emphasises that gender roles cause sex disparities in behaviour when people respond to the expectations of others and act on their own gender identities. People are socialised to be influenced by these processes. Additionally, biological processes such as hormonal and neurological systems are engaged in reaction to these gender roles.

Experimental paradigms with controlled variables are often used in studies evaluating these processes, yielding incontestable results, according to Wood and Eagly (2012). Because of

these primary factors, men and women adapt in different ways. Social and individual pressures to adhere to gender norms significantly impact how people act. Gender roles, which refer to socially accepted norms that differ depending on a person's perceived gender, become an integral element of a person's gender identity, ultimately determining whether they identify as a man or a woman. According to Wood and Eagly (2012), cultural norms impact societal constraints and individual identities because social norms significantly influence behaviour. Gender norms are reinforced because they provide social proof for commonly held views and facilitate interaction between people of different genders. Hence, people tend to act in ways consistent with gender norms.

The concept that gender roles shape social behaviour informed the development of interview questions that explored how participants' gender identities influence their professional interactions and decisions. These questions aimed to uncover how deeply ingrained gender norms impact their day-to-day work as drivers. As a result, people's actions are affected by their gender identities as they use gender norms as a framework for behaving in social situations. People's actions tend to be congruent with their self-views even when no one is watching. When children are young, they start to form their gender identities by establishing that they belong to one sex and that their sex is a constant aspect of who they are. Children's gender identities are moulded further by assimilating societal norms and ideas. The ability to anticipate the emotions of others and identify what views are widely accepted in society are bolstered by a solid foundation of the theory of mind. Growing up, children learn to act in ways congruent with their gender identities and the norms established by society.

BCT provides a valuable framework for understanding how gendered norms shape the psychological contract between workers and employers. For example, Saudi women may expect flexibility and support from ride-hailing platforms, influenced by societal views of their dual roles as workers and caregivers. However, companies may hold implicit biases, viewing

women's roles through a gendered lens that undervalues their professional contributions. This interplay directly impacts women's perceptions of fairness, trust, and job satisfaction within the gig economy.

BCT has been extensively applied to explore perceptions of biology and social constructs in diverse contexts. For instance, it has informed analyses of gender stereotypes in educational settings (Wood & Eagly, 2012), workplace behaviours (Eagly et al., 2020), and cross-cultural variations in gender roles (Tarife, 2017). These studies demonstrate BCT's utility in explaining how biological and social factors converge to shape behaviours and societal expectations. By applying BCT to the gig economy, this study extends its scope, offering novel insights into how gender roles intersect with platform-based work structures.

#### *3.2.5.1 Effects of Social Expectations on Behaviour*

Gender roles generate disparities in conduct across genders by setting assumptions on attitudes and responses in relation to biological sex. According to this theory, children as young as five years old express disapproval of their classmates who conduct themselves in a way that contradicts societal gender standards. People's views of the consequences of adhering to or breaking established gender norms provide evidence of sanctions for gender roles. Women who act in an agentic manner are sometimes punished more severely than others because of the negative connotations often attached to female leaders (Dappa et al., 2019). Women face repercussions when they project an air of superiority or strive to further their interests, especially when their actions to this end are aggressive. This understanding of the effects of social expectations on behaviour was used to create interview questions that investigate whether participants feel they must conform to traditional gender roles and how they manage any tension between societal expectations and professional goals.

### *3.2.5.2 Effects of Gender Identity on Behaviour*

Individuals' gender identities influence their behaviour via self-regulatory processes, whereby they evaluate and guide their conduct based on their gender identity. Most males would say they are more of an agent, whilst most women would say they are more of a community person. In addition, people use sex-stereotypical occupations, hobbies and interests to describe who they are. Generally, men and women act in ways that are typical of their genders, with feminine behaviours more common among women and masculine behaviours more widespread among men (Baumle et al., 2020). The self-regulation of gender identities follows a sequential process, beginning with the evaluation of one's behaviour to ascertain whether it aligns with prevailing gender norms. People's moods and sense of pride in themselves improve with a clearer idea of how their actions meet social expectations. Emotions offer critical feedback on whether an individual should adjust their behaviour. Positive emotions signal alignment with their gender identity, while negative emotions suggest a mismatch. However, gender norms can be limiting for some, as they may feel these expectations are imposed (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020).

In addition, traditional gender norms restrict people's freedom of action, which can lead to feelings of discontent. For instance, women who identify as traditionally feminine face social pressure to put their children's needs ahead of their own, which results in foregone job prospects and diminished economic autonomy. Conversely, men who embrace a conventional male identity feel compelled to repress their feelings and avoid seeking treatment when they need it, which may harm their mental health (Breda et al., 2020). Therefore, although gender identities serve as helpful guides for behaviour and boost self-esteem, they can also cause distress when they conflict with an individual's core beliefs and life objectives. This discussion on the effects of gender identity on behaviour was integrated into interview questions that explore how participants' gender identities influence their decisions and interactions within



their professional environment. The questions aimed to understand how these identities either support or challenge their work as female drivers in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

### **3.2.6 Sex Differences and Similarities in Psychological Research**

PsycINFO recorded over 22,000 journal articles comparing women and men on human sex differences between 2000 and 2011 (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Several attempts at summarising the relevant literature have been made using narrative and meta-analytic approaches. According to studies on the topic, gender stereotypes are accurate depictions of social reality that propagate into accepted gender roles and shape stereotypical attitudes and actions. People's preconceived notions about men and women are more nuanced than broad generalisations and can account for contextual modifiers of sex differences. While gender stereotypes do an excellent job of predicting the gender gaps seen in psychological studies, they do have their flaws.

There are several facets to consider when analysing the link between gender stereotypes and real sex differences. While certain gender preconceptions, such as those about the prevalence of certain occupations, are supported by facts, stereotypes may sometimes be prejudiced or wrong. It is also worth noting that the gaps between the sexes in terms of behaviour are often narrow and subject to contextual modification (Eisend, 2019). Understanding the dynamics of gender roles and working to achieve gender parity requires an appreciation of the interplay between gender preconceptions and biological disparities between the sexes. Individuals and communities should fight harmful stereotypes and advance more accurate and fair portrayals of women and men by understanding the role that gender stereotypes play in society and the world at large (Fausto-Sterling, 2019). The understanding of sex differences and similarities in psychological research was used to design interview questions that probe into participants'

experiences with gender stereotypes in the workplace. These questions were intended to reveal how these stereotypes affect their professional opportunities and interactions.

### **3.2.7 Differences and Similarities in Psychological Sex in Modern Nations**

Psychological sex distinctions and overlaps may exhibit temporal and cultural variability due to the influence of biosocial factors on male and female psychology. The roles of men and women in society are shaped by ecological, economic, and technological conditions, which in turn affect the psychological disparities between the sexes (Archer, 2019). People adjust their psychological traits to optimise benefits and minimise drawbacks in their present environments. To examine changes in sex-relevant psychological differences, it is necessary to rely on multiple forms of evidence. As Asperholm et al. (2019) argue, meta-analyses of recent psychological investigations across countries, as well as cross-cultural studies conducted at different points in time, are crucial. These studies reveal notable disparities between the sexes in personality traits, behaviours, attitudes, values, and cognitive abilities. Intra-national cross-temporal analyses provide the most reliable assessments of the biosocial constructionist paradigm, demonstrating how sex-relevant psychological traits evolve in response to societal changes.

#### *3.2.7.1 Changes in Psychological Sex Differences Across Historical Time*

Specifically in industrialised cultures, research in psychology over the last 50 years has shown a radical shift in the traditional perceptions of sex differences and similarities. Both men's and women's personalities and habits have changed to accommodate the new norms of society (Eagly et al., 2020). When birth rates dropped, women joined traditionally male-dominated fields, including business, law, medicine and academia. This transition has led to the erosion of traditional gender norms and the acceptance of gender inequity in gender interactions. Women now have expanded psychological abilities, notably traditionally male traits.

Thus, the gender gap in men's favour in self-reported agentic qualities has narrowed, and women have made significant progress. Even women's sexual habits and tastes have changed (Biasi & Sarsons, 2022). Women nowadays are more likely to engage in sexually permissive, self-confident conduct than they were in the past. Between 1939 and 2008, preferences for romantic partners shifted, with both sexes looking for characteristics that fit the modern division of work (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Women's professional aspirations and occupational interests have increasingly aligned with those of males, as women now place more importance on leadership, status, power, and challenge. The gender gap that formerly favoured men in mathematics is gradually closing in the general population, including in terms of women's abilities and interests in the subject. The observed changes illustrate the speed at which modifications in social positions may impact characteristics and actions.

Moreover, studies have explored how gender intersects with other social categories, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. For instance, the struggles and experiences of women of colour often differ from those of White women or men of colour (Scheuerman et al., 2019). Intersectionality is crucial in understanding gender inequality, as research shows significant disparities in employment, education, health, and criminal justice outcomes for women of colour. Over the last half-century, gender roles, behaviours, and attitudes have shifted considerably in many parts of the world. These societal changes have been driven by alterations in the economy, family dynamics, and popular culture. However, these shifts have not eradicated the widespread nature of gender discrimination and inequality in many areas of society. This understanding of how psychological sex differences have changed over time informed interview questions aimed at exploring how Saudi women perceive changes in gender norms within their society, particularly regarding their experiences as drivers.

### *3.2.7.2 Variability in Psychological Sex Differences Across Nations*

When comparing men and women from different countries, gender equality is a crucial element. According to Walter et al. (2020), much research has been carried out to determine whether and how gender equality influences international sex disparities. Implications for foreseeing gender roles and individual traits in human cultures are substantial when such research is conducted. Wood and Eagly (2012) provided the first empirical evidence that sex disparities are narrower in more gender-balanced societies. The men and women of these societies were polled on topics including the qualities they look for in a partner and the age range they would consider most suitable for a life partner. The study found that in gender-equal countries, sexes choose similar mates, with fewer preferences aligning with traditional roles where women seek older, wealthy partners and men prefer younger, homemaking spouses (Boniol et al., 2019).

As recorded by Sharma et al. (2021), a more precise metric of national gender equality created by World Economic Forum researchers was used in a study by Zentner and Mitura (2012), demonstrating the same impact. After accounting for characteristics including a country's distance from the equator and GDP, researchers discovered stronger evidence of gender equality in mating choices in more gender-equal countries. Even in the most egalitarian countries in the sample, men valued a partner's ability to be a good housewife more than women valued such traits in a partner. In contrast, women valued a partner's financial capabilities more than their own. Wood and Eagly (2012) point out that gender equality's impact on men's and women's mental health has been the subject of several international comparisons. Gender equality research shows that the sexes exhibit similarities in several areas of their personalities. The gender gap in arithmetic performance has narrowed or closed altogether in countries where gender equality has improved. Men's victimisation of women by

intimate partners was also observed to be less common in countries where women had more legal protections.

Other research, however, has shown the opposite to be true, indicating that sex differences may be more pronounced in countries with greater gender parity. Specifically, differences between men and women on the Five Factor Model of personality and values were more evident in countries with higher gender equality (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Additionally, in such countries, women were more likely than men to harbour negative feelings and attitudes about mathematics. These findings challenge traditional explanations of how men and women are expected to divide domestic duties. Studies using self-ratings on subjective assessment scales to gauge psychological dispositions often reveal greater sex disparities with increasing gender equality. According to Wood and Eagly (2012), the level of gender equality in a country likely influences the norm or reference point individuals use when completing rating scales. This understanding of variability in psychological sex differences across nations informed interview questions exploring how Saudi women perceive their experiences in relation to global trends in gender equality.

### **3.3 Indigenous Institutional Theory**

The second theory, Indigenous Institutional Theory (IIT), informs this study from an institutional perspective. This theory primarily aims to compare and contrast the perspectives of Indigenous academic staff with those of non-Indigenous senior executives, higher education governance structures, and institutional rhetoric (Povey et al., 2022). Specifically, IIT is a theoretical framework that combines institutional theory with Indigenous standpoint theory, creating a hybrid paradigm for studying Indigenous experiences in higher education and other institutional settings (Coates et al., 2022). The framework is typically applied within higher education settings to offer clarity on the role these institutions play in achieving the goals of

Indigenous peoples and communities. However, in this study, IIT was adapted to the context of ride-hailing services to explore broader institutional factors, demonstrating its potential applicability beyond educational contexts. The theory provided a framework for examining how institutional policies, platform structures, and broader societal norms impact these women's engagement in the platform-based gig economy.

IIT was chosen for this study because of its unique ability to address the intersection of socio-cultural norms and institutional structures, particularly for marginalised groups. While various institutional theories could have been considered, including neo-institutional theory, resource dependency theory, and institutional isomorphism, each presented limitations in addressing the specific challenges faced by Saudi women in ride-hailing services. For instance, neo-institutional theory excels at analysing organisational behaviours, legitimacy, and the ways organisations adapt to societal norms but lacks the cultural sensitivity required to understand the lived experiences of marginalised individuals (Chowdhury, 2023). Similarly, resource dependency theory and institutional isomorphism focus on power dynamics and standardisation processes but fail to account for resilience and community-specific challenges (Sakib, 2020; Davis & Cobb, 2009). IIT bridges these gaps by integrating institutional theory with Indigenous Standpoint Theory, making it uniquely positioned to explore the cultural and institutional challenges faced by Saudi women. This theory's emphasis on resilience, community commitment, and cultural specificity aligns closely with the study's objectives, making it the most fitting framework for uncovering the institutional and societal factors shaping women's participation in the gig economy.

### **3.3.1 Resilience and Community Commitment**

To comprehend the dynamic relationship between Indigenous communities and institutions, IIT emphasises the significance of resilience and community commitment. In this framework,

resilience is defined as Indigenous peoples' capacity to persevere in the face of adversity, especially in their interactions with institutions that were not developed with their traditional values and worldviews in mind. The centuries-long struggle for existence in hostile surroundings and maintaining cultural practices and traditions despite colonialism and persecution have formed the key quality of resilience that characterises Indigenous cultures (Coates et al., 2022). The ability to bounce back from adversity has been crucial to the continued existence of Indigenous communities, and it remains so for Indigenous peoples' success in institutional contexts today. This is especially true in higher education, where Indigenous students and faculty members are frequently confronted with major obstacles in negotiating systems not built to accommodate their cultural identities and values (Ali et al., 2021). Thus, IIT also emphasises the significance of community commitment.

It alludes to Indigenous people's dedication to one another as they engage with various institutions as well as to their common beliefs and goals. This dedication stems from Indigenous customs of communal decision-making and the belief that personal happiness and group prosperity are inextricably linked (Bruton et al., 2022). For Indigenous people, connecting with institutions, especially in the context of higher education, requires a strong sense of community and a willingness to persevere through adversity (Ford et al., 2020). A strong sense of community is especially crucial in higher education, where Indigenous students and faculty often experience social and cultural isolation. In this light, the community's commitment can provide a safe space where Indigenous people may meet and learn from each other. Indigenous people benefit greatly from the guidance and encouragement of their communities as they face the unique difficulties of living in institutional settings. The ability of Indigenous people to bounce back from adversity and devote themselves to their communities is crucial to their success in formalised contexts. By acknowledging and

upholding these principles, organisations foster settings that are more welcoming to and respectful of Indigenous peoples' identities, histories, and worldviews.

This concept of resilience and community commitment guided the creation of interview questions exploring how Saudi women navigate challenges in a male-dominated field. The questions sought to uncover how participants rely on social networks and community ties to overcome institutional and societal barriers. By focusing on these aspects, the study aimed to understand the role of community support in their professional experiences. The findings are expected to highlight the importance of resilience and social connections in helping Saudi women succeed in such environments.

### **3.3.2 Indigenous Leadership**

IIT describes Indigenous Leadership as an evolving phenomenon informed by Indigenous societies' historical experiences and shared worldviews. It acknowledges that Indigenous people's leadership techniques are shaped by their knowledge, worldviews and cultural traditions. Community members, elders and knowledge keepers are some of the many people who play important roles in what is seen as a collaborative Indigenous Leadership approach. Establishing and sustaining connections and cultivating trust within the community are always emphasised in this form of leadership (Khalifa et al., 2019).

Indigenous Leadership is also understood as a process that calls for cooperation with non-Indigenous individuals and groups to further Indigenous communities' hopes and dreams. To do so, it is necessary to form alliances predicated on trust, open communication and joint decision-making (Madden, 2019). Indigenous Leadership in the context of higher education entails creating and maintaining avenues for incorporating Indigenous knowledge, viewpoints and practices into curricula and official policy. It requires empowering Indigenous students, staff and faculty to become leaders in their own right and supporting their efforts to advance



Indigenous knowledge and culture (Coates et al., 2022). Overarchingly, Indigenous Leadership is seen as a process that develops over time based on Indigenous people's cultural values and practices, and that requires constant attention to self-reflection, open communication and teamwork.

This understanding of leadership shaped the interview questions that examine how Saudi women perceive their roles as leaders or pioneers in the ride-hailing industry. The questions were intended to explore whether participants view themselves as trailblazers for other women in SA. Additionally, the questions aimed to uncover how they navigate the responsibilities and challenges associated with this pioneering role. The study seeks to understand their experiences as they break new ground in a traditionally male-dominated field.

### **3.3.3 Institutional Rhetoric**

Coates et al. (2022) define institutional rhetoric as the method by which an institution portrays and conveys its beliefs, aims and identity to its constituents, as described by IIT. Mission statements, policies and strategic plans are all examples of formal communication, whereas public declarations and speeches are examples of informal communication. From the perspective of Indigenous Leadership in higher education, institutional rhetoric can play a significant role in shaping the experiences and perceptions of Indigenous academic staff. A university can be perceived as dishonest or hypocritical if its mission statement emphasises diversity and inclusion, yet it fails to offer sufficient resources to Indigenous faculty members (Risi et al., 2023).

According to IIT, it is essential to compare the rhetoric of institutions with the lived reality of Indigenous employees and communities (Coates et al., 2022). Institutions' promises to promote diversity, equality and inclusion can then be evaluated in light of actual practices, allowing for a more accurate assessment of their true dedication. IIT also stresses the significance of

Indigenous peoples' viewpoints and ideals reflected in official discourse. It includes admitting that colonialism happened and still has an effect, giving due credit to Indigenous academics and teachers and making a firm promise to help Indigenous communities. Institutions can also show their dedication to reconciliation and building a fairer society by taking these steps.

IIT offers valuable insights into how institutional rhetoric influences the psychological contract between organisations and their workers. In the context of Saudi women drivers, ride-hailing platforms often project commitments to diversity and inclusion. However, discrepancies between these corporate promises and the lived experiences of women drivers can erode trust and resilience. IIT highlights how such gaps between rhetoric and reality shape workers' perceptions and engagement within the industry.

This concept of institutional rhetoric guided the development of interview questions that investigate whether the policies and public statements of ride-hailing companies align with the lived experiences of Saudi women drivers. The questions aimed to explore potential discrepancies between the companies' stated commitments to diversity and inclusion and the actual experiences of female drivers in the industry. By examining these differences, the study seeks to uncover any gaps between corporate rhetoric and the realities faced by Saudi women drivers. This exploration is crucial in understanding the true impact of these policies on the ground.

### **3.4 Biosocial Construction and Indigenous Institutional Theories**

BCT and IIT provide useful theoretical frameworks for examining the complex interplay between individual behaviours and institutional structures that shape the experiences of Saudi female drivers in the gig economy. These theories guided the development of the interview questions, ensuring that the data collected was comprehensive and relevant to both personal and institutional levels of analysis. According to biosocial constructionists, personality and

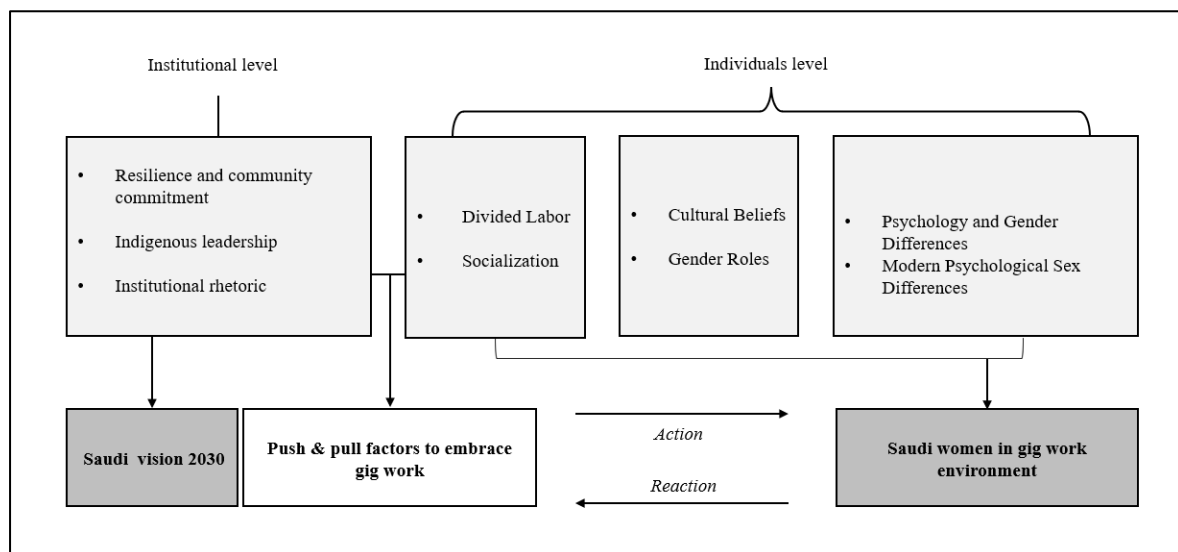
behaviour are shaped by a combination of environmental and genetic influences (Wood & Eagly, 2012). According to this theory, the environment has a key impact on how biological materials are expressed throughout development. This idea claims that it is impossible to understand an individual's growth without taking into account both their biological makeup and their social environment. In studying human behaviour, BCT offers a more nuanced and holistic approach that recognises the complex interplay between biological and social factors.

IIT, on the other hand, aims to clarify the role that institutions play for Indigenous communities and peoples by developing a theoretical framework that accounts for their distinct cultural, social, and political circumstances. It places significant emphasis on Indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions, recognising their importance in shaping organisational frameworks and practices. The theory underscores the need to value Indigenous knowledge systems and to collaborate with Indigenous communities in achieving common objectives (Coates et al., 2022). Together, these ideas create a holistic framework for investigating social phenomena, one that considers the interplay between biological and social factors as well as the cultural and historical contexts in which institutions operate. This comprehensive approach provides a sophisticated understanding of the various aspects influencing human and organisational behaviour, making it an effective tool for examining complex subjects, such as the experiences of female drivers.

The integration of BCT and IIT theories offers a robust theoretical foundation for the study, ensuring that the interpretation of data is both comprehensive and nuanced. Together, these theories provide a framework for exploring critical themes such as work-life balance, the psychological contract, and other key aspects identified in prior literature, including flexibility, financial independence, and stereotypes. BCT explores how societal norms and perceptions of biology shape women's roles and expectations, directly influencing their ability to balance professional ambitions with familial responsibilities. Meanwhile, IIT sheds light on

institutional dynamics, particularly how organisational policies, structures, and rhetoric impact women's trust, resilience, and overall engagement. This dual-theoretical approach ensures a holistic understanding of the socio-cultural and institutional factors shaping the professional experiences of Saudi women drivers, offering novel insights into the gig economy. Figure 6 illustrates the theoretical framework guiding this analysis.

**Figure 6:** An illustration of the theoretical framework guiding this analysis.



### 3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has established the theoretical foundation for understanding the institutional and socio-cultural dimensions of Saudi women's participation in ride-hailing services. By combining BCT and IIT, the study adopts a dual perspective that highlights the intersection of individual and institutional dynamics. BCT provides insights into how gender roles and expectations evolve through the interplay of biological and social influences. This perspective underscores the fluidity of gender norms and their adaptability across different contexts and societies, offering a valuable framework for analysing the experiences of Saudi women drivers. IIT complements this by focusing on the institutional factors that shape marginalised groups' interactions with broader systems. Its emphasis on resilience, community ties, and institutional

rhetoric allows for a critical examination of how policies, organisational structures, and societal norms influence women's agency and participation. Together, these theories enrich the study's exploration of the complex realities faced by Saudi women in the gig economy. This integrative approach ensures that individual behaviours and structural factors are addressed, providing a well-rounded basis for the subsequent analysis. The chapter reinforces the study's commitment to bridging theoretical insights with the practical realities of women navigating non-traditional roles.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The methodology aims to elucidate, justify and evaluate the research process in scientific inquiry, while methods represent the technical principles and processes for data gathering and analysis (Carter & Little, 2007). Thus, this chapter outlines the strategies, practices, methods, and methodology used to conduct the study, which are organised into seven sections. The first section discusses the epistemological and ontological viewpoints that inform this study, aiming to situate the value of the adopted approach. The second section explains why a qualitative case study best fits the research methodology and design. The third section elucidates the essence of the case studies and outlines the approach to their construction. The fourth section provides an overview of the data collection techniques, and the difficulties encountered. The fifth section details how the data was analysed. The sixth section identifies several issues of research quality. Finally, the last section highlights various ethical considerations relating to the study.

### **4.2 Philosophical Underpinnings**

Given that a researcher's worldview and values influence research design, it is crucial to understand how the researcher interprets reality and defines acceptable knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This requires identifying and clarifying the researcher's underlying philosophy or framework for interpreting reality, as individual actions are shaped by these beliefs (Ruona, 2009). Additionally, Creswell and Clark (2011) assert that the terms 'worldview' and 'paradigm' are interchangeable and inform each other, with a paradigm guiding a worldview and vice versa. Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1994) posit that a paradigm is an investigator's core viewpoint, influencing their approach and decisions regarding ontology and epistemology.

The selection of a paradigm holds paramount importance in shaping the researcher's perspective and approach to a study. As posited by Guba and Lincoln (1994), the paradigm serves as the primary lens through which investigators perceive their research endeavour. This selection is deemed more crucial than the choice of research methods due to the overarching influence of the researcher's worldview, as articulated by the paradigm in which they operate (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This worldview provides the conceptual underpinnings for the research and ultimately determines its focus (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Denscombe, 2010). However, Bryman (2004) argues that the choice of methodologies is intricately intertwined with the study paradigm. Within this framework, scholars formulate philosophical conjectures on the essence of the universe, encompassing perspectives such as pragmatism, realism, interpretivism and positivism (Bryman, 2004). The researcher's methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation are profoundly shaped by these underlying assumptions, emphasising the critical role of paradigmatic frameworks in guiding the research process.

#### **4.2.1 The Constructivist Paradigm**

The constructivist paradigm, characterised by meaning-making as a product of human experience and social influences on knowledge (Hwang, 1996), was chosen as the guiding philosophical framework for this study. Within this paradigm, reality is perceived as socially constructed rather than objectively given (Cohen & Manion, 1994), and research methods aim to comprehend the diverse range of human experiences (Mertens, 2005). Reality is thus shaped by individuals' beliefs, values and worldviews (Ryan, 2018), which underscores the researcher's acknowledgement of the influence of their own history and experiences on the study and their consideration of participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2003).

The present research adopts a constructivist perspective, focusing on Saudi female drivers and government initiatives aimed at enhancing female participation in gig labour platforms.

Embracing the belief that knowledge is constructed through individuals' experiences, perceptions, interpretations and reflections, this study emphasises the importance of personal opinion and judgment. Interactions with multiple participants are deemed crucial for comprehensively understanding the experiences of Saudi women providing ride-hailing services. The constructivist approach aligns with the researcher's worldview and understanding of knowledge formation, which affirm the subjective nature of reality and the active role of individuals in constructing their understanding of the world. Additionally, the research begins with in-depth interviews with women to explore their perspectives, attitudes and motivations regarding ride-hailing services as a form of temporary, flexible employment. Through this approach, the study aims to capture the nuanced experiences and perceptions of Saudi female drivers in the gig economy, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and labour participation in the Saudi context.

In sum, each paradigm represents a distinct set of assumptions about the nature of reality and can be seen as a 'way of looking' at a phenomenon (Babbie, 2007). To effectively investigate the research issue and goals, the researcher must select a suitable methodological and philosophical approach (Robson & McCartan, 2015). However, researchers must be mindful of how their worldviews shape the development of a study's theoretical framework and methodology (Crotty, 1998). While a constructivist approach is valuable, it is not comprehensive on its own. Other philosophical concepts, particularly ontology and epistemology, play crucial roles in informing research methodology and interpretation (Bryman, 2004). The next subsections will delve into these factors and the researcher's position on each.



#### **4.2.2 Relativist Ontology**

Ontology, as defined and described by Matthews and Ross (2010), refers to "the way the social world is perceived and what assumptions can be made about the nature and reality of the social phenomena within it" (p. 23). According to certain theorists, it is impossible to separate one's subjective perception of reality from reality itself (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). These theorists argue that nothing exists independently of the mind; reality manifests as an unbounded subjective experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Consequently, individuals construct their own meanings and realities through social interactions and connections, shaping their perception of the world based on their unique experiences and perspectives.

Levers (2013) posits that "the purpose of science within a relativist ontology is to comprehend the subjective experience of reality and acknowledge multiple truths" (p. 1). In the context of this study, a relativist ontology is particularly appropriate because it allows for a deep exploration of the diverse and subjective experiences of Saudi women participating in the gig economy. The gig economy, especially within the conservative socio-cultural context of SA, is inherently complex and multifaceted. The perspectives and experiences of women who engage in gig work, particularly as ride-hailing service drivers, are shaped by a myriad of cultural, social, and economic factors that are unique to their environment.

This study implements a relativist ontological position to thoroughly understand the experiences of gig workers, including those from platforms such as Uber, Careem, Wsslini, and Bolt, and to analyse stakeholders' strategies for enhancing female driver participation. The primary aim is to explore and improve female involvement not only on these specific platforms but also across other gig economy platforms. To achieve this, in-depth interviews with Saudi female drivers residing in SA were conducted and analysed. Acknowledging the diversity of perspectives and realities among participants, this research recognises that an in-depth investigation of the relationships between social actors and phenomena is essential. It is

presumed that participants and their realities coalesce to produce social phenomena, making each participant's narrative of events unique and inherently subjective.

This fundamental tenet aligns with the relativist worldview, which recognises and embraces the uniqueness of each individual's experiences and perspectives. In the context of this research, the adoption of a relativist ontology is crucial for capturing the rich and varied experiences of Saudi female drivers within the gig economy. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how these women perceive and navigate their roles in a rapidly evolving labour market that intersects with traditional gender dynamics and societal norms in SA. By embracing this ontological perspective, the research aims to shed light on the complexities of gender dynamics and labour participation in the Saudi context, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the social phenomena surrounding women's engagement in the gig economy.

#### **4.2.3 Subjectivist Epistemology**

Epistemology, as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1998), pertains to the relationship between the investigator and the knowledge being sought. The epistemological assumption, as outlined by Bryman (2004), encompasses the researcher's ideas about what can be known and how it can be known (Barton, 2012; Crotty, 1998). Subjectivist epistemologies, as underlined by Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Burr (1995), reject the notion of a theory-neutral observational language, positing instead that knowledge and reality are co-constructed through social processes. From this perspective, reality is not simply discovered but is actively constructed by individuals through interests (Habermas, 1972), discourses (Foucault, 1977), traditions (Gadamer, 1975), and language games (Wittgenstein, 1975).

In the context of this study, subjectivist epistemology emphasises that the researcher does not merely uncover objective facts but instead engages in interpreting social phenomena through

the lens of the participants' subjective experiences. This approach involves acknowledging that any interpretation of data is inherently influenced by the theoretical framework and the context within which the research is conducted. Therefore, rather than striving for objectivity, the researcher recognises that constructing meaning requires the integration of theory to make sense of the social realities under investigation (Levers, 2013). This is consistent with the constructivist paradigm, which posits that knowledge is collaboratively created by the researcher and participants, with a focus on comprehending the subjective meanings and interpretations that people attribute to their experiences.

In discussing the epistemology of this study, the focus is on the active role of participants in constructing meaning within their social contexts. This approach prioritises the participants' internal representations of social phenomena, understanding that these representations are shaped by their unique perspectives and experiences (Barton, 2012). The subjectivist epistemology is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for an exploration of how Saudi female drivers in the gig economy interpret and make sense of their roles, challenges, and interactions within a socially and culturally specific environment.

This study takes a subjectivist epistemological position, acknowledging that knowledge is not just seen but also collaboratively generated via the researcher's and participants' engagement. By focusing on human interpretations and the meanings they construct, the research aims to provide a deep understanding of the subjective experiences and social realities of Saudi female gig workers. While the constructivist paradigm, supported by a subjectivist epistemology, underpins this research, it is important to reflect on other paradigms considered during the conceptualisation phase. The following section provides a comparative evaluation of these paradigms.

#### 4.2.4 Paradigmatic Perspectives: Beyond the Chosen Path

In developing the philosophical foundation for this study, alternative paradigms were critically evaluated to ensure a robust philosophical foundation and that the chosen framework aligns with the research objectives. The literature presents diverse theoretical paradigms in research philosophies, including positivist and post-positivist, constructivist, interpretivist, transformative, emancipatory, critical, pragmatist, and deconstructivist approaches (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). However, alongside constructivism, critical realism and positivism have gained widespread recognition across various academic disciplines, providing robust frameworks for exploring and understanding complex social phenomena (Bay et al., 2021; Zhang, 2023; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Each offers unique strengths, yet they also present limitations that render them less suitable for this study, which seeks to explore the subjective experiences of Saudi women providing ride-hailing services within the gig economy. Therefore, while other paradigms, such as positivism and critical realism, offer distinct perspectives on the nature of reality and knowledge, this study is guided by the constructivist paradigm. To illustrate the comparison and rationale for the choice of constructivism, the table below summarises the key ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of each paradigm and their relevance to this research:

*Table 3: Critical comparison of research paradigms*

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Suitability for Study
<b>Positivism</b>	Objective reality	Observer-independent	Quantitative, deductive	Unsuitable, as it neglects subjective and contextual nuances central to understanding Saudi women's experiences.
<b>Critical Realism</b>	Stratified reality	Mediated through structures and perceptions	Mixed methods, iterative	Less suitable because the paradigm seeks to explain subjective experiences within broader causal structures. While useful for exploring the interplay of institutional and

				personal levels, this study's emphasis is on subjective meaning-making, making constructivism more appropriate.
<b>Constructivism</b>	Socially constructed reality	Subjective and co-constructed	Qualitative, inductive and abductive	Ideal for capturing the richness of individual experiences and how participants construct meaning. It fits the methodological approach of this study (qualitative, inductive, and abductive) and aligns with the focus on subjective experiences rather than broader structural causality.

#### 4.2.4.1 *Positivism*

In the past, positivism has dominated the social sciences because it is based on the idea that reality is quantifiable, objective, and unaffected by human perception (Bryman, 2004; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Based on the idea that social phenomena may be investigated in the same way as scientific sciences, positivism, which has its roots in Auguste Comte's writings, prioritises empirical observation and the search for generalisable rules (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In order to find universal truths, positivist research often gives priority to measurable data, such as numerical patterns, correlations, and statistical connections. Although this method has many advantages, especially when it comes to situations where quantifiable and repeatable results are needed, it is essentially at odds with the goals of this investigation for two main reasons: its focus on measurability and its limited ability to delve deeply into context.

The goal of this research, which is to comprehend the complex, subjective experiences of Saudi women drivers on ride-hailing services, is incompatible with positivism's emphasis on quantifiable and broadly applicable results. Surface-level insights are best provided by

quantitative techniques that are often used in positivist frameworks, such as statistical modelling or organised surveys. A positivist research may, for example, track factors like the number of trips completed by Saudi women drivers, their pay levels, and their working hours. The deeper, culturally rooted meanings that these women attach to their employment are not captured by such measurements, despite the fact that they are useful for providing a broad picture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

As an illustration, a poll may show that 40% of Saudi women consider ride-hailing to be a flexible career, but it would not explain why flexibility is important to them or how it helps them balance work, family responsibilities, and social standards. Going beyond statistical generalisations to investigate the subjective interpretations behind these results is necessary to comprehend such intricacies (Smithe et al., 2021). Because they enable a thorough examination of participants' lived experiences within their sociocultural settings, qualitative techniques based on constructivist paradigms are more appropriate in this situation (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Positivism's strict methodological emphasis on generalisable variables further restricts its application to this study, especially when it comes to capturing the cultural nuances of Saudi women's experiences. Structured surveys and controlled experiments are examples of positivist approaches that are often attacked for failing to take into consideration the social and cultural factors that influence people's actions and perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). Such an error is especially troublesome when it comes to Saudi women entering typically male-dominated settings like ride-hailing.

For instance, positivism may quantify how often female drivers get public criticism without looking at how they internalise or fight back. In a similar vein, it may measure changes in working hours while ignoring the complex reasons behind them, such as attempts to conform

work schedules to family expectations or avoid social censure. Qualitative, participant-centred approaches that can handle the complexity and fluidity of cultural settings are necessary to uncover these deeper levels of meaning, which are crucial to comprehending the lived experiences of Saudi women drivers (Charmaz, 2014).

While positivism has made significant contributions to the social sciences by advancing the understanding of measurable and generalisable phenomena, its limitations in addressing subjective, context-dependent experiences render it unsuitable for this study. The rigid emphasis on quantification and objectivity does not align with the study's focus on exploring the rich, nuanced narratives of Saudi women drivers in ride-hailing services. Instead, qualitative approaches that prioritise cultural sensitivity and participant perspectives are better positioned to achieve the research objectives. Consequently, this study adopts a constructivist paradigm, which is not constrained by the methodological rigidity of positivism and is better equipped to capture the complexity of human experiences in culturally specific settings.

#### *4.2.4.2 Critical realism*

Bhaskar's (2008a) conceptualisation of critical realism offers a sophisticated framework that unites positivism with interpretivism. While acknowledging the existence of an objective world apart from human cognition, it underlines that human perceptions are the primary means by which this reality is comprehended. The goal of critical realism is to identify and clarify the underlying structural processes and causal connections that influence perceptible events (Archer et al., 2013). Although this method provides insightful information, especially when examining macro-level dynamics and social structures, it is less in line with the objectives of this research, which centre on the unique, subjective experiences of Saudi women using ride-hailing services.

The focus on causality is one of critical realism's main drawbacks. Critical realism often tends towards macro-level analysis by emphasising the discovery of structural processes, which may obscure the interpretative depth of unique lived experiences. A critical realism research may, for instance, look at how SA's Vision 2030 initiative's policies, including the repeal of the driving prohibition and the encouragement of women's economic involvement, have structurally made it possible for women to enter the gig economy. This kind of study might show how regulatory changes and a rise in female employment in ride-hailing services are causally related (Bhaskar, 2008b).

This strategy, nevertheless, runs the danger of ignoring the many and very personal ways that different women understand these shifts. For example, whereas some women may see ride-hailing as a life-changing and liberating opportunity, others may see it as a short-term fix for unemployment or as a financial need brought on by financial limitations. The main emphasis of critical realism on structural causation would eclipse these subjective interpretations, which are essential to comprehending the complex realities of participants (Danermark et al., 2019).

The propensity of critical realism to overgeneralise and often see social issues through a homogeneous lens is another disadvantage. When researching various populations, like Saudi women doing gig labour, this is especially challenging since they may have quite varied motives, difficulties, and perspectives on their experiences. For example, critical realism can come to the conclusion that economic changes, including the removal of structural impediments, are the main cause of women's participation in ride-hailing services. Although this explanation is useful for comprehending patterns at the macro level, it is unable to adequately convey the wide range of personal experiences.

While some women may modify their work schedules to conform to cultural standards or home responsibilities, others may encounter opposition from family members or social stigma while



using ride-hailing services. Understanding the complexity of women's involvement in the gig economy requires an awareness of these diverse experiences. Contrarily, constructivist methods give individual voices top priority, guaranteeing that these varied viewpoints are accurately reflected (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Charmaz, 2014). However, critical realism could serve as a valuable paradigm in future research to explore the interaction between individual agency and broader systemic influences in this context.

#### *4.2.4.3 Constructivism as an Alternative Framework*

Constructivism emphasises personal meaning-making and the subjective interpretations that individuals make of their experiences, in contrast to critical realism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of this study, which is to document the complex, individual stories of Saudi women using ride-hailing services, is more in line with constructivist paradigms, which allow researchers to explore participants' lived experiences in more detail. Constructivism is a better method for this study because of its adaptability to the contextual and interpretative elements of social phenomena.

While critical realism offers significant strengths in uncovering the structural and systemic factors that influence social phenomena, its focus on causality and generalisation renders it less suitable for this study. The emphasis on macro-level structures and mechanisms risks sidelining the rich, subjective diversity of individual experiences. In contrast, constructivism's participant-centred approach ensures that the varied perspectives of Saudi women drivers are authentically explored and represented. By focusing on individual narratives, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how these women navigate their roles within the gig economy. This foundation also supports the methodological choices and analytical strategies discussed in the following sections. The subsequent sections will detail the research design, which is informed by this epistemological stance, guiding the selection of methods and analysis that are congruent with the interpretive nature of the study.

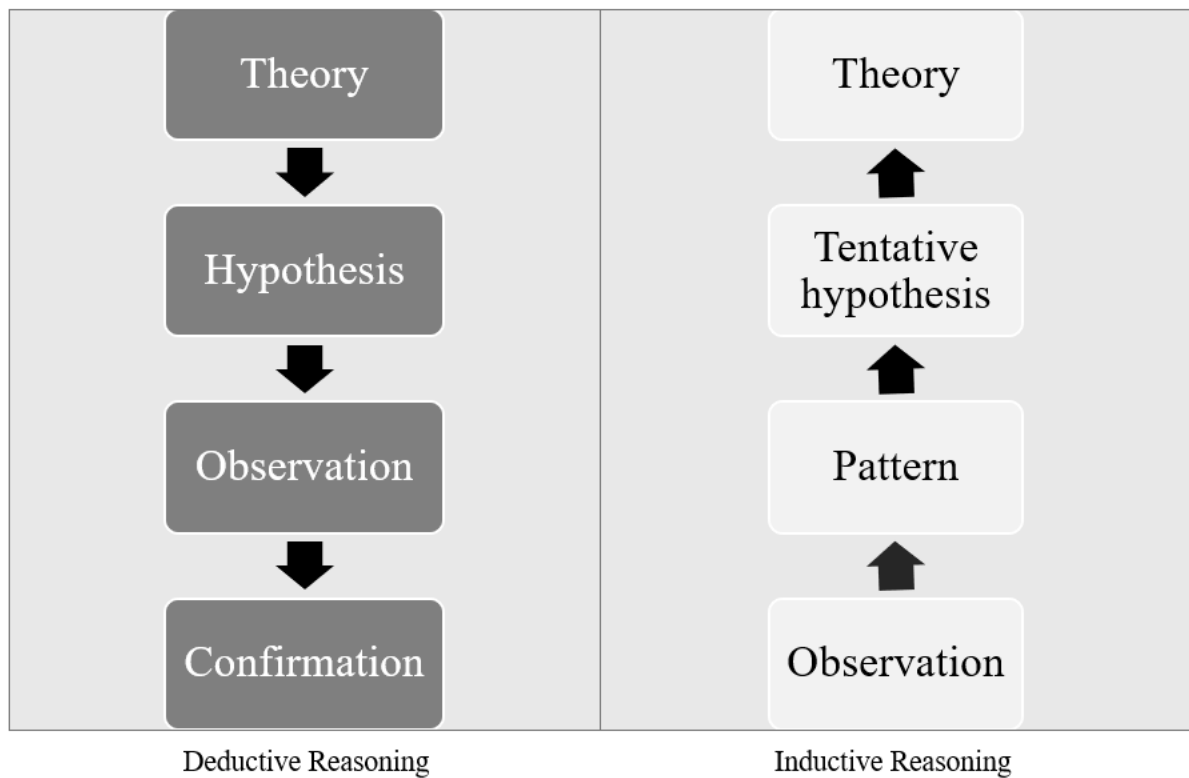
### **4.3 Research Design**

Research is a careful and systematic way of solving problems and gaining new knowledge (Bhattacharyya, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011). The term ‘research design’ refers to the strategy used to bridge the gap between theoretical concerns and practical, realisable empirical study (Creswell, 2014). Given real-world constraints including space, time, resources and the researcher’s availability, design is primarily concerned with goals, applications, intents and plans (Hakim, 2000). According to Crotty (1998), researchers must be self-aware because their worldviews shape the study design and data collection and analysis procedures. Therefore, research must be rigorous and methodical and satisfy appropriate norms and criteria for validity and dependability (Asenahabi, 2019). Further information on the study design is provided in the next subsections.

#### **4.3.1 Selected Approaches**

Inferring new knowledge from existing facts constitutes the reasoning process, as articulated by philosophers and scientists (Goel & Dolan, 2004). Collective studies are typically categorized as either deductive or inductive, depending on their objectives (Wolcott, 1990). Deductive reasoning occurs when researchers formulate a hypothesis or a set of assumptions to test throughout their investigation (Bryman, 2004), while inductive reasoning involves constructing a theory after evidence has been amassed (Barton, 2012). For example, observing sparrows possessing a unique biological feature may lead researchers to infer, though not definitively conclude, that other birds share similar characteristics (Liew et al., 2018), as depicted in Figure 7. This process illustrates that if all birds possess a particular trait, then sparrows must also exhibit it (Liew et al., 2018).

**Figure 7:** Deductive and inductive reasoning (Bryman & Bell, 2011)



#### 4.3.1.1 Inductive Reasoning: Grounded Analysis

Soiferman (2010) recommends basing inductive arguments on experience or observation and grounding deductive arguments in laws, rules, or other accepted principles. This perspective is supported by Thomas (2006), who argues that inductive approaches are particularly valuable in exploring new research areas with limited existing theories. Given that the present research addresses a relatively new area with limited existing theories, the inductive method is deemed more appropriate. Accordingly, this study employed inductive data analysis to derive conclusions from the data, allowing themes to emerge naturally from participants' narratives. Using deductive reasoning in this context could have limited the data by imposing predefined themes and codes, potentially overlooking important insights unique to this study's focus. These emergent themes were then interpreted through the lens of the theoretical frameworks

discussed in Chapter 3, specifically BCT and IIT, ensuring a coherent integration of theory and data.

This approach ensures that while the analysis remains grounded in the participants' experiences, the theories provide a structured lens for understanding how these experiences are shaped by broader socio-cultural and institutional factors. Theories were not used to impose predefined hypotheses but were instead employed to guide the formulation of interview questions and later to interpret the findings, adding depth and contextual understanding to the emergent themes (see Subsection 4.3.1.2, for more details on the usage of the theoretical framework). This method aligns with constructivist studies, which underscore the significance of individuals' social connections and meaning-making processes in shaping their personal experiences (Patton, 2002). Inductive research, which is typically interview-based and aligned with interpretivism, is favoured by constructivists who rely on participants' perspectives to generate insights (Creswell, 2003).

By combining inductive reasoning with theoretical interpretation, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the experiences of Saudi women in ride-hailing services. This dual approach contributes to both practical and theoretical insights, offering a comprehensive analysis that acknowledges the complexity of the socio-cultural and institutional influences at play. Through this process, the study not only adds to the existing literature but also offers practical recommendations for businesses operating in similar socio-cultural contexts. The integration of theory and inductive analysis thus ensures that the research findings are both robust and relevant to the broader academic and practical discourse (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

#### *4.3.1.2 Abductive Reasoning: Theory-Driven Inquiry*

This study employs abductive reasoning as the guiding principle for developing interview questions and interpreting findings within the methodological framework. While the thematic

analysis applied in this research adopts an inductive, data-driven approach, the use of theoretical frameworks such as BCT and IIT for interview design aligns with the abductive reasoning process. Abduction bridges the gap between data and theory, offering a systematic way to generate insights that are both empirically grounded and theoretically informed (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This iterative interplay between empirical observations and theoretical constructs refines theories while uncovering novel insights, making abductive reasoning a powerful tool for qualitative inquiry (Shank, 1998).

The case study methodology, which centres on Saudi women's experiences in the gig economy, benefits significantly from abductive reasoning. Specifically, BCT and IIT guided the semi-structured interview design, ensuring alignment between theoretical constructs and the study's objectives while addressing socio-cultural and institutional nuances. Abduction facilitated the formulation of questions that captured the nuanced realities of gender roles and institutional barriers in a culturally sensitive and academically rigorous manner. This ensured that both personal and institutional challenges were examined within the relevant socio-cultural and organisational contexts, as advocated by Anfara and Mertz (2014).

Abductive reasoning is particularly compatible with qualitative research within a constructivist paradigm, as both approaches emphasise the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants (Reichert, 2009). Constructivism recognises that reality is subjective and socially constructed, aligning well with the iterative and flexible nature of abductive reasoning. By engaging with participants' narratives and linking them to broader theoretical constructs, abductive reasoning enables a re-interpretation of data through theoretical lenses, offering deeper insights into complex social phenomena (Charmaz, 2006). While themes emerged inductively through thematic analysis, the interplay between theoretical insights and participant narratives contextualised these themes within the broader socio-cultural and institutional landscape (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For instance, inductively derived

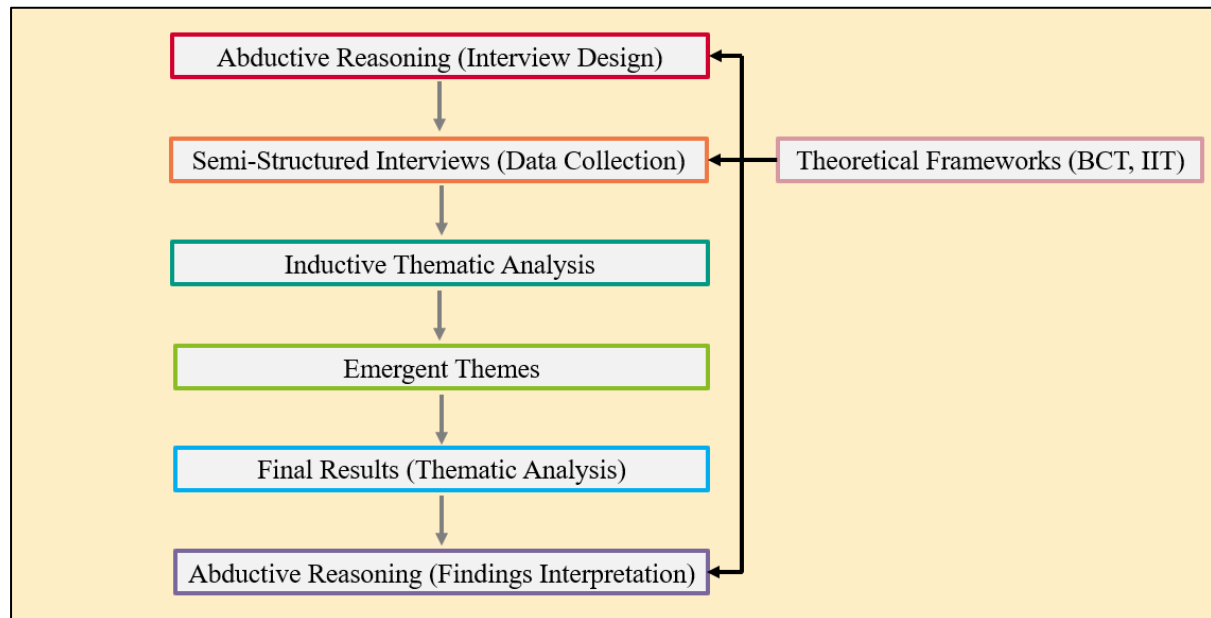
themes around gender dynamics were enriched by theoretical insights from BCT and IIT, deepening the analysis of Saudi women's engagement in ride-hailing services. This approach allowed theoretical frameworks to inform the analysis without imposing pre-conceived categories, maintaining a balance between theory and data.

The rationale for employing abductive reasoning stems from its capacity to balance theoretical insights with data-driven discoveries, elucidating the interplay between Saudi culture, Islamic traditions, and operational challenges faced by global companies like Uber. By linking socio-cultural norms with practical business implications, abductive reasoning enriches the study's contribution to both theory and practice. For instance, socio-cultural and religious norms in SA significantly influence women's employment opportunities, as emphasised by Tlaiss and Al Waqfi (2022). This iterative process accommodates the exploratory nature of qualitative research while allowing for theoretical refinement and validation. It ensures that findings are grounded in participants' lived realities while contextualising these insights within broader theoretical and socio-cultural frameworks. The integration of multiple frameworks, as supported by Creswell and Poth (2018), reinforces the methodological rigour of the study, validating abductive reasoning as a comprehensive and contextually relevant approach.

In summary, integrating abductive reasoning into the methodology chapter justifies the theory-driven development of interview questions and the interpretation of findings. By using BCT and IIT as interpretative lenses, this study achieves a nuanced analysis that bridges theoretical understanding and empirical evidence. The resulting insights contribute novel perspectives on the socio-cultural and institutional barriers Saudi women face in the gig economy. This abductive approach is methodologically robust and well-suited to qualitative research within a constructivist framework, ensuring that the findings are both contextually relevant and theoretically significant. Figure 8 illustrates the integration of abductive and inductive

reasoning, demonstrating how theoretical frameworks guide interview development (abductive) while emergent themes derive from data (inductive).

**Figure 8:** Research process - integrating abductive and inductive reasoning



### 4.3.2 Methodological Choices

The path that researchers must follow to conduct their study is known as the research methodology (Asenahabi, 2019). The methodology is the definition of the procedures involved in performing scientific research within a given paradigm (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010; Kneebone, 2002). While qualitative research techniques are the norm in the constructivist paradigm, quantitative approaches may be employed to supplement qualitative data (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). However, this study used qualitative methods only because its focus is on observing and understanding people in their natural environments, particularly the real-life experiences of Saudi women participating in the gig work environment (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

As mentioned earlier, the chosen methodology is influenced by the researcher's epistemological and ontological viewpoints, which impact the data-gathering procedures (Gray, 2014). Quantitative and qualitative approaches are the main options (Lee & Hubona,

2009; Myers & Avison, 2002), and the constructivist perspective is typically associated with qualitative methods. Understanding how social actors shape social reality is a key aspect of constructivism (Gergen, 2009; Robson & McCartan, 2015). The primary goal of this study is to comprehend the experiences and challenges of women working as drivers in SA while also considering how institutional structures and policies shape these experiences. Therefore, the qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of these intertwined aspects through interviews, field observations, and analysis of secondary sources.

Quantitative methodology was excluded because researchers using this approach often lack control over study variables, which may lead to erroneous conclusions in studies focused on complex social dynamics (Wellington, 2015). In contrast, qualitative research is better suited to delving into the underlying reasons behind people's actions and exploring their perceptions, interactions, and reflections in context (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Like in this study, qualitative researchers often use methods such as interviews, field observations, and collecting participants' stories in a non-judgmental setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Given the need to thoroughly understand the experiences of Saudi women in gig work, a qualitative approach is most suitable. This approach not only facilitates an exploration of individual experiences but also allows for an analysis of the institutional factors that influence these experiences. The inclusion of secondary data analysis, such as reviewing relevant policies, regulations, and organisational practices, complements the primary qualitative data and provides a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional frameworks shape the gig work environment in SA.

Because the perspectives and experiences of Saudi women regarding gig work may differ significantly from those of Western women, this study employs a qualitative methodology



using a single case study and multiple respondents to gain a deeper understanding of social environments. This approach explores the experiences and perceptions of Saudi women vis-à-vis gig work while also considering the broader institutional context that influences these experiences. The next subsection lays out the rationale for conducting a single case study.

#### **4.3.3 Research Strategy**

According to Saunders et al. (2019), a research strategy is an overarching plan that integrates a researcher's philosophical views with the methodologies used to collect and evaluate data. The philosophical foundation for the case study, as a research strategy, supports the debate about the relative merits of the various qualitative research methods (Schell, 1992). Yin (2018) argues that case studies are a helpful empirical tool for situations when the boundaries between a phenomenon and its environment are not immediately apparent because they allow for in-depth investigation of a current occurrence (the "case") while simultaneously studying its real-world setting. Furthermore, Yin (2018) puts forward three factors for selecting a research strategy: (1) the structure of the research question, (2) the extent to which the researcher has influence over the phenomenon of interest, and (3) the extent to which the phenomenon of interest is recent.

The first factor concerns whether the query is a 'what', 'why', 'how', 'who', or 'where' inquiry. Whether investigating a 'what' descriptive question or a 'how' or 'why' exploratory issue, case study research is the method of choice. The researcher's control over the phenomenon is the second factor. A case study research technique is preferred when a researcher cannot control or influence the observed event, in contrast to laboratory scientific studies where the researcher can modify certain factors. The third factor is related to whether the phenomenon under investigation is recent or ancient; in the latter case, a case study is more appropriate. This study

satisfied all three requirements for using a case study research strategy as laid out by Yin (2018).

The research aims to address the following research questions: **(1)** What motivates Saudi female drivers to participate in ride-hailing services, and how do these motivations align with their personal and professional aspirations? **(2)** What barriers and challenges do Saudi female drivers face in the ride-hailing sector, and how do these shape their experiences and satisfaction? **(3)** How have Saudi government policies influenced the recruitment, training, and participation of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing sector? **(4)** What opportunities and policy recommendations could further empower Saudi female drivers and promote inclusivity in the gig economy? These questions meet the first and third requirements for a case study, as they begin with ‘what’ and ‘how’. Additionally, the study meets the second requirement because the researcher has no control over the phenomenon of interest (i.e., Saudi women’s decisions to work as drivers or engage in other gig work). Finally, the research satisfies the third requirement by examining the contemporary phenomenon of ride-hailing services and companies, prompting a need for further theoretical exploration to enhance understanding of this phenomenon.

Consequently, this research focuses on the experiences of Saudi women engaged in gig work for a ride-hailing service company, serving as a single case study. Through this approach, the study aims to provide insight into the complexities of the issues within a practical setting (Soy, 1997; Stake, 1995). The current literature justifies the use of this approach in the context of gig work. Portman-Smith and Harwood (2015) argue that case studies of gig work aim to collect information in specialised fields and settings where little is known rather than generalising findings. Similarly, Gandini (2019) suggests that while case studies of the gig economy are lacking, the nature of the gig economy makes it conducive to such an approach. Notably, the

use of a case study is a distinguishing aspect of qualitative research, aiming to contextualise the research topic and provide the focus for future transferrable insights (Yin, 2014).

The inclusion of the third and fourth research questions concerning government policies explicitly acknowledges the role of institutional factors in shaping Saudi women's participation in the ride-hailing industry. This approach ensures that the study not only explores the individual experiences of the participants but also examines the broader socio-political and economic context in which these experiences occur. By focusing on how government policies influence both the supply and demand dynamics within the gig economy, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between individual agencies and institutional structures. This dual focus on individual and institutional factors allows for a more holistic exploration of the issues at hand, ultimately contributing to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of the complexities surrounding Saudi women's involvement in gig work.

To ensure methodological coherence, Table 4 presents a comprehensive mapping that illustrates the alignment between the research questions, objectives, theoretical frameworks, and methodological tools. This table shows how each research question is systematically linked to specific study objectives and theoretical foundations, providing a clear pathway from the conceptual framework to the data collection process. It also emphasises how the study integrates theory into practice, ensuring that the theoretical frameworks guide both the development of research questions and the design of the data collection instruments. By mapping these elements, the table highlights the structured approach taken to ensure that the research strategy effectively addresses the study's aims.

*Table 4: Linking research questions, objectives, and frameworks: a methodological map*

Research Question	Objective(s)	Theory	Interview Guide Section(s)
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<b>RQ1: What motivates Saudi female drivers to participate in ride-hailing?</b>	Objective 1, Objective 2	BCT	For Saudi women drivers: This component focuses on understanding the broader context of women's participation in the Saudi gig economy and investigates their motivations and barriers for choosing to work as ride-hailing service drivers. Questions explore themes such as financial independence, personal aspirations, and behavioural triggers that influence their decision to engage in gig work.
<b>RQ2: What barriers and challenges do Saudi female drivers face in the ride-hailing sector, and how do these shape their experiences and satisfaction?</b>	Objective 1, Objective 3, Objective 4	BCT	
<b>RQ3: How have Saudi government policies influenced the recruitment, training, and participation of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing sector?</b>	Objective 1, Objective 5, Objective 6	IIT	For government officials and ride-hailing apps representatives: This component examines how government policies and initiatives influence the recruitment and management of female drivers, while also exploring opportunities for collaboration with ride-hailing platforms to empower women. It addresses challenges in policy implementation and collaboration, probes officials' views on fostering partnerships, and identifies actionable recommendations to enhance inclusivity and increase female participation in the gig economy.
<b>RQ4: What opportunities and policy recommendations could further empower Saudi female drivers and promote inclusivity in the gig economy?</b>	Objective 1, Objective 7, Objective 8	IIT	

The table also reflects how the semi-structured interview guide (provided in Appendix 9: Semi-structured Research Interviews Guide, p. 426) was designed to capture insights relevant to each research question. Each interview guide section corresponds to the themes outlined in the table, ensuring that data collection directly addresses the research questions and integrates theoretical constructs. For example, questions exploring motivations for ride-hailing participation align with BCT and focus on themes such as economic aspirations and behavioural triggers, as mapped in the table. Similarly, questions addressing institutional challenges and policy impacts draw on IIT and are aligned with themes on recruitment, training, and retention processes. This alignment ensures that the interview guide serves as a robust tool for collecting data that is both

grounded in participants' lived experiences and framed within the study's theoretical framework.

#### **4.4 Bounding the Case**

Defining the case is an essential first step in every case study investigation. The question, 'What is the case?' is indeed fundamental to every case study (Taylor, 2013, p.4). In a case study, the researcher selects a bounded context to analyse a phenomenon, event, organisation, group, person, or policy (Merriam, 2009). This process involves establishing the limits of the study's context, target demographic, sample size, and required duration (Merriam, 1998). A single case study is particularly appropriate when the case represents a unique or critical instance of a broader phenomenon, allowing for in-depth exploration within a specific context (Yin, 2014).

For this study, the single case study concerns the phenomenon of gig work within the ride-hailing industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), with a specific focus on the collective experiences of Saudi female workers engaged in this sector. The unit of analysis (UoA) is defined as the group of Saudi female gig workers within the ride-hailing industry. This single UoA ensures that the study's conclusions relate to the group-level experience, rather than to individual drivers or other entities. While data will be gathered from individual Saudi female drivers, government/ministry employees, and ride-hailing service employees, these participants serve as contextual informants rather than separate units of analysis. Their insights contribute to a broader understanding of how external policies, platform structures, and organisational contexts influence the shared experience of the main UoA, which is the group of Saudi female gig workers.

This clear definition of the UoA is essential for maintaining the study's focus and ensuring that the conclusions drawn are directly relevant to the collective experiences of Saudi female gig workers (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By focusing on the group as a whole, the study aims to

understand how the collective experiences of these women shape and are shaped by the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional contexts of gig work in SA. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the shared challenges, motivations, and outcomes that characterise their participation in the gig economy. The case is bounded by place (ride-hailing services in the KSA) and time (from job recruitment to employee retention or turnover). The research will be conducted over the entire doctoral study period, enabling a thorough longitudinal analysis.

*Table 5: Case, context, and UoA in the study*

<b>Component</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Case</b>	The phenomenon is the collective gig work experience of Saudi female workers within the ride-hailing industry, which serves as the primary focus of this study.
<b>Context</b>	The context is the ride-hailing industry in SA and the socio-economic environment, which provides the setting for examining the gig work phenomenon but is not the case itself.
<b>UoA</b>	The group of Saudi female gig workers serves as the main UoA, while other participants (e.g., government employees and ride-hailing service staff) provide contextual insights but are not treated as separate UoAs.

In refining the definition of the case and its components, this study draws upon established methodologies within single case study research, such as those outlined by Yin (2014), Merriam (2009), and Baxter & Jack (2008). The clear bounding of the case as a single group-level unit of analysis ensures methodological rigour, allowing for a focused and systematic investigation. This approach enables the study to be deeply rooted in the specific contextual realities of gig work among Saudi women in the ride-hailing sector. By capturing these nuanced

experiences, the research may offer valuable insights that contribute to broader discussions on gig work, gender, and economic participation in the Middle East.

#### **4.4.1 Setting**

In the context of a case study, the ‘setting’ refers to the environment or context within which the case is situated (Yin, 2018). This encompasses the physical, social, cultural, and historical backdrop against which the events described take place, as Yin (2018) stated. Understanding the setting is crucial in qualitative research, particularly in case studies, as it provides a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation (Stake, 1995). In this study, the setting is multifaceted, comprising both the digital and physical spaces where gig work occurs and where data collection takes place. Specifically, this includes the ride-hailing platforms used by the participants, government websites that provide regulatory information relevant to the gig economy, and the social media accounts of companies involved in the ride-hailing industry in SA. Moreover, the setting also includes the broader socio-cultural and economic context of SA, which significantly influences the experiences of female gig workers. This socio-cultural framework is essential for understanding the unique challenges and opportunities that Saudi female gig workers face, as it shapes their participation in the gig economy and their interaction with both digital and physical work environments.

The participant selection process was intentionally designed to be flexible, allowing for interviews to be conducted either in person or via online platforms, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. This flexibility is critical for ensuring that the study can accommodate the diverse circumstances of the participants, many of whom may have varying levels of accessibility to physical interview sites due to socio-cultural constraints or personal preferences (Simons, 2009). The research site is not strictly limited by operational hours, except for those set by government bodies, which typically operate from Sunday to

Thursday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. and on Fridays from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. This operational flexibility is advantageous for comprehensive data collection, as it allows the researcher to be responsive to the participants' schedules and the operational contexts of the institutions involved (Gerring, 2007). The absence of a rigid time constraint also facilitates a more thorough exploration of the gig work phenomenon within its natural setting, capturing the nuances of how these workers navigate their roles within the ride-hailing industry in SA (Yin, 2018).

It is also important to reiterate that while the 'setting' describes the broader context, the UoA for this study is specifically defined as the group of Saudi female gig workers. Other participants (e.g., government/ministry body employees and ride-hailing service employees) are treated as sources of contextual data but do not constitute separate UoAs. This single UoA forms the basis of the study's conclusions and insights, providing a detailed understanding of how the group of Saudi female gig workers engage with and are impacted by the gig economy in SA (Ragin & Becker, 1992). By clearly delineating the setting and its components while maintaining a single UoA, this study adheres to established methodologies within case study research (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). The careful articulation of the setting, combined with the specific focus on the group-level UoA, ensures that the research is methodologically sound and poised to contribute meaningful insights into the phenomenon of gig work among Saudi women.

#### **4.4.2 Study Population**

The second step involved determining the study's population based on the research objectives and the researcher's expertise (Robinson, 2014). As a member of a religious, conservative, and family-oriented society, the researcher possesses deep familiarity with the dynamics of the workforce and the broader societal context. This understanding informed the selection criteria for participants, ensuring that the study's population was both relevant and representative of



the key stakeholders involved in ride-hailing services in SA. The study population consists of two primary groups: Saudi female drivers engaged in ride-hailing services (drivers' level) and key informants from governmental entities and ride-hailing companies (institutional level).

The employees from ride-hailing companies are supplementary, as their operations and decisions are largely shaped by the policies and regulations set by the governmental entities. Despite multiple attempts to engage various ride-hailing companies, all approached organisations ultimately declined participation in this study, except for Amnuh and Nawaaem. This limited participation reflects the ride-hailing industry's competitive and sometimes secretive nature, where companies may be hesitant to share operational details. Consequently, including only these two companies, alongside the governmental entities, was necessary to ensure the study could still capture relevant insights from the private sector's perspective.

Primary data was collected from Saudi female drivers to gain insights into their personal and professional experiences within the gig economy. This approach was essential to understanding women's unique challenges and opportunities in this emerging sector. Additionally, primary data was collected from representatives of governmental entities and the two participating ride-hailing companies to explore how policies, regulations, and operational practices shape the gig work environment in SA. The selection criteria for participants from both groups are outlined in Table 6, ensuring that the participants were well-positioned to contribute meaningful insights into the study's research questions.

**Table 6:** Selection criteria according to the FWC's conditions

Level of Goals	Participants	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Data Source
drivers' level	Saudi Female Drivers in Ride-Hailing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Must be of Saudi nationality</li> <li>- Must have more than one year of experience in ride-hailing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-Saudi nationality</li> <li>- Less than one year of experience</li> <li>- No insured</li> </ul>	Primary Data (Interviews)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Must own an insured vehicle</li> <li>- Actively engaged in ride-hailing services in SA</li> <li>- Willing to participate in interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>vehicle</li> <li>- Not currently employed in ride-hailing services</li> <li>- Unwilling to participate</li> </ul>	
<b>Institutional Level</b>	Representatives from Governmental Entities and Ride-Hailing Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Must be actively involved in policymaking or operations related to ride-hailing in SA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not involved in relevant operations or decision-making roles</li> </ul>	Primary Data (Interviews); Secondary Data (FWC Website, Reports)

#### 4.4.3 Sampling Approach

The procedure for selecting participants is a critical consideration, particularly given the challenge of obtaining a representative sample of the population (Gray, 2014). In this single case study, data was gathered from women in multiple sites, including Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam. To achieve this, purposive sampling was deemed ideal. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of participants with a specific aim in mind, utilising or creating contacts accordingly (Wellington, 2015; Silverman, 2010). This approach allows for the rational and non-random selection of study subjects to fulfil a particular objective. Furthermore, purposive sampling enables targeting data-dense situations in line with the research's focus (Johnson & Waterman, 2004).

The selection of Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam as sample sites for the purposive sampling technique is grounded in their status as large and relatively more developed cities in SA (Addas & Maghrabi, 2020). Furthermore, these cities span the country's western, middle, and eastern regions, where drivers' experiences may vary. Accordingly, the sample criteria were restricted to Saudi women of any driving age who reside and work in Jeddah, Riyadh, or Dammam. Additionally, the sample was further narrowed down to women who are Arabic speakers and

possess at least 1 year of experience in gig work for shared ride services. Non-Saudi individuals and Saudi women residing outside of the specified cities were excluded from the sample. Regarding language, the study materials were translated into Arabic and then back-translated into English by a second independent bilingual Arabic-English speaker to identify any discrepancies between the original and back-translated versions. Employing back-translation and decentring techniques preserves ecological validity across both languages (Brislin, 1970).







To address the research questions effectively, a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling techniques was utilised to identify female Saudi drivers likely to possess relevant experiences (Etikan, 2016). Snowball sampling, a form of referral sampling, was employed by encouraging respondents to recommend other potential participants (Wellington, 2015). During interviews, participants were asked to share the invitation email or link with other drivers who may be interested in participating in the research (Matthews & Ross, 2010). This approach ensured the recruitment of a diverse range of participants with varied experiences, enriching the depth and breadth of the data collected.



To provide context and clarity regarding the participant pool, Table 7 presents a detailed demographic profile of the study participants. This profile offers insights into the diversity of the participants, including age, occupation, and driving experience, highlighting the range of perspectives captured in this research. For clarity, ease of reference, and to maintain participant confidentiality, individuals have been anonymised and are identified using unique codes (e.g., P1, P2, P3, etc.). Additionally, Table 8 presents the platform firms that the participants worked for, showcasing the variety of platforms used in the study. Table 9 also summarises the representation of participants from governmental entities and ride-hailing organisations. This inclusion reflects the study's holistic approach, incorporating diverse institutional perspectives alongside individual narratives to provide a nuanced understanding of the gig economy landscape.

**Table 7:** Demographic profile of the study participants

Participant	Marital status	Age	Children	Degree	Employment	City
P1	Single	20–29	No	Bachelor	Unemployed	Riyadh
P2	Single	20–29	No	Bachelor	Private sector	Riyadh
P3	Married	30–39	Yes	Bachelor	Unemployed	Jeddah
P4	Single	30–39	No	Bachelor	Public sector	Riyadh
P5	Married	20–29	Yes	Student	Unemployed	Jeddah
P6	Married	30–39	Yes	Bachelor	Private Sector	Riyadh
P7	Married	40–49	Yes	Bachelor	Unemployed	Riyadh
P8	Married	30–39	No	Bachelor	Unemployed	Damam
P9	Married	30–39	Yes	Bachelor	Private sector	Jeddah
P10	Single	20–29	No	Bachelor	Public sector	Riyadh
P11	Married	40–49	Yes	High School	Unemployed	Damam
P12	Married	40–49	No	College	Unemployed	Damam
P13	Single	20–29	Yes	Bachelor	Unemployed	Jeddah
P14	Single	20–29	No	Student	Unemployed	Jeddah
P15	Single	40–49	Yes	College	Public sector	Riyadh
P16	Single	20–29	No	Bachelor	Unemployed	Jeddah
P17	Married	40–49	Yes	Bachelor	public sector	Riyadh
P18	Married	30–39	Yes	Bachelor	Unemployed	Jeddah
P19	Single	30–39	Yes	Bachelor	Unemployed	Riyadh
P20	Single	20–29	No	Student	Unemployed	Riyadh
P21	Single	20–29	No	Bachelor	Unemployed	Riyadh
P22	Married	30–39	Yes	Bachelor	Public sector	Damam

**Table 8:** The platform firms that the study participants worked for

App name	Description
<b>Wsslini</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purely women's app.</li> <li>- It was not eligible for government support.</li> <li>- All participants worked for this app.</li> <li>- Famous among the Saudi female drivers.</li> </ul>
<b>Bolt</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Male and female drivers can use this app.</li> <li>- Not all participants worked for this app.</li> </ul>
<b>Leena</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purely women's app.</li> <li>- The app was good but suddenly stopped working.</li> <li>- Participants missed the enjoyable experience working for this app.</li> </ul>
<b>Careem</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Male and female drivers can use this app.</li> <li>- It was eligible for government support.</li> <li>- Not all participants used this app.</li> </ul>
<b>Jeeny</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Male and female drivers can use this app.</li> <li>- Not all participants used this app.</li> <li>- It was eligible for government support.</li> </ul>
<b>Uber</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Male and female drivers can use this app.</li> <li>- It was eligible for government support.</li> <li>- Not all participants used this app.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Nawaaem</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purely women's app.</li> <li>- Not all participants used this app.</li> <li>- Good app but not as famous as Wsslini.</li> <li>- It was eligible for government support.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Amnuh</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purely women's app.</li> <li>- Not all participants used this app.</li> <li>- Good but not as famous as Wasslini.</li> <li>- It was eligible for government support.</li> </ul>

**Table 9:** Participants who represent both the government and app bodies

Participants	Agency Name
E1	Future Work Company (FWC)
E2	Transport General Authority (TGA)
E3	Nawaaem app
E4	Amnuh app

#### 4.4.4 Sampling Size

Determining the appropriate sample size is a critical aspect of sampling techniques (Rafail, 2018). However, the literature offers varying perspectives on what constitutes an adequate sample size for qualitative investigations (Boddy, 2016). Some researchers, such as Patton (2008) and Gerrish (2006), emphasise the importance of the quality of cases over the quantity of the sample, supported by Morse (2016), who asserts that selecting the most qualified individuals for the sample is paramount irrespective of sample size. Consequently, the literature supports data collection until saturation is reached, wherein gathering additional data does not

yield any new insights (Silverman, 2010). Therefore, the focus was on ensuring the richness and depth of data rather than adhering strictly to a predetermined sample size.

#### **4.5 Research Methods**

Research methods refer to the procedures used for gathering and analysing data in a study (Crotty, 1998). In qualitative research, the methodology emphasises understanding the individual's viewpoint to address issues of experience, meaning, and perspective (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This study employed a combination of qualitative approaches, including semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, to comprehensively gather information. By adopting diverse qualitative methods, the researcher sought to capture a wide range of perspectives and insights relevant to the research questions.

In this study, the primary method was semi-structured interviews, conducted with two key groups: Saudi female drivers engaged in ride-hailing services and representatives from governmental entities and ride-hailing companies in SA. These interviews aimed to explore the personal experiences, challenges, and perspectives of the female drivers, as well as the policies, regulations, and operational practices from the organisational stakeholders' viewpoint. The interviews were complemented by the analysis of documents, including government documents, relevant regulations, and contracts associated with the ride-hailing industry. The integration of these approaches aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, particularly how governmental policies and organisational practices influence the experiences of Saudi female drivers.

Additionally, the motivation to delve deeper into the social issue drove the utilisation of these methods (Saldaña, 2011). Employing multiple research methods, as suggested by Cassell and Symon (2004), enhances the credibility and validity of a study. By utilising diverse approaches, researchers can mitigate the risk of errors or biases, thereby increasing confidence in the study's

findings. This methodological triangulation is crucial in qualitative research, as it allows for a more nuanced and thorough exploration of the research questions, leading to richer and more reliable results.

#### **4.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

As a data collection method, a qualitative interview involves the interviewer asking questions to the interviewee, either in person or over the phone (Crabtree & DiCicco-Bloom, 2006). Interviews help researchers learn about the participants' attitudes, beliefs and values, which would be difficult to probe using other research techniques like questionnaires or content analysis (Wellington, 2015). Robson (2011) proposes interviews as a means of learning what people think, experience and/or believe. Indeed, participants can utilise their own words and thoughts in interviews (Berg & Lune, 2011). As a result, semi-structured interviews were selected for this research because the interviewees may become more invested in the study if they feel that they are having a meaningful conversation with the researcher (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

Qualitative interviews may indeed be arranged on a spectrum of varying degrees of rigour and depth, depending on the format. There are three primary categories of interviews: structured interviews, where questions are provided in a set sequence; semi-structured interviews, which employ open-ended inquiries depending on the study's emphasis; and unstructured interviews, which resemble a natural discussion (Fontana & Fray, 2008; Robson, 2011). In this study, the plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews to learn more about the phenomenon from the Saudi women's points of view and get in-depth knowledge about it. In this type of interview, researchers may ask more specific questions and get more thorough responses from respondents (Saunders et al., 2007). Interviewees are given greater flexibility and freedom to share their thoughts and opinions in semi-structured interviews.



#### *4.5.1.1 The Interview Process*

Three elements were taken into account when conducting interviews. Each participant was free to choose between an in-person or over-the-phone interview. Interviews with Saudi women drivers living far from the researcher's city were conducted by phone or Skype since this study was conducted in three distinct cities. Face-to-face interviews were prioritised unless participants preferred phone calls. The main goal was to conduct a face-to-face interview because although phone calls or online meetings let researchers conduct interviews with people who live far away, speeding up the data-gathering process (Saunders et al., 2009), in face-to-face interviews, the interviewer is able to observe the participant's body language, facial expressions and other non-verbal social cues in a secure and comfortable setting, which is a major benefit (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021).

After recruiting the research participants from different cities through various media platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter, obtaining signed informed consent forms was the second step. The consent form was sent via email or text to remote interviewees. Subsequently, the interviews were recorded as the third essential aspect of the interview protocol. As noted by Edwards and Holland (2013), qualitative researchers often emphasise active listening, effective questioning and appropriate follow-up techniques during recorded interviews. These practices are essential for eliciting genuine responses from participants and understanding their perspectives fully. Finally, per Taj's (2017) suggestion, all recording equipment and software were assessed and tested before the interviews to prevent any technical issues and optimise time efficiency.

#### *4.5.1.2 Interview Piloting*

Researchers continuously update and refine interview guidelines, which often require conducting multiple interviews, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative approaches

(Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). This is particularly crucial in qualitative research, given the forward-thinking nature of qualitative data analysis (Van Teijlingen et al., 2001). Pilot testing enables researchers to gain insights and ideas for refining their study as they conduct interviews. Consequently, it is essential to adjust questions before actual interviews to preemptively address any potential issues.

To ensure that the methodology used in the research and the resulting findings are of sufficient quality, a pilot study was carried out with three participants. The interview questions thus underwent a comprehensive piloting process before being used in the actual research. Surprisingly, the participants in the pilot interviews provided very detailed data. Upon transcribing the data from these first interviews, it became evident that several participants had shared significant information that was not previously addressed. The pilot interviews lasted approximately 120 minutes, after which the participants expressed gratitude. Subsequently, the questions were evaluated using the knowledge gained from the pilot research.

Overall, conducting pilot studies ensures that research tools provide accurate and reliable results (Saunders et al., 2012). The pilot study in this research validated the efficacy of the final approach and provided valuable feedback for improving data-gathering tools and analytic strategies. As stated by Gudmundsdottir and Brock-Utne (2010) and Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001), one goal of performing a pilot study is to improve the overall quality of the research. In this study, the outcomes provided insights into whether the chosen methods were practical, efficient and suitable for the larger study. Nonetheless, the pilot interviews did not result in major changes to the research protocol or methods, indicating that the initial planning was thorough and the proposed methods were well-suited to the research question and context.

#### *4.5.1.3 Transcribing and Translating Interviews*

Numerous scholarly works (Burnard, 1994; McCormack, 2000) have addressed the management of interview transcripts, yet scant literature (Fielding, 1994; Easton et al., 2000; Wellard & McKenna, 2001; Poland, 1995) provides comprehensive guidance regarding the transcription process. However, the accuracy and format of transcriptions are profoundly influenced by the auditory comprehension of the transcriber (MacLean et al., 2004). Consequently, Green and Thorogood (2018) advocate for the immediate transcription of interviews upon completion. This expeditious approach fosters the researcher's retention of the interview's content, thereby enhancing note-taking proficiency. Additionally, this prompt transcription ensures data integrity and mitigates the risk of information loss, facilitating a seamless transition into the analytical phase. Ultimately, this proactive stance potentially saves time, sparing the researcher the need to revisit and re-listen to interviews for recall purposes if transcriptions are promptly executed.

Within the context of this research, interviews were carried out in Arabic, followed by the transcription of data into English. Although the original data corpus was in Arabic, it was considered essential to transcribe it into English to facilitate wider distribution. Mastery of the intricacies of the Arabic language was essential to fully understand the tales of the participants. The only obstacle encountered throughout this approach was the amount of time spent switching between two languages, which spanned approximately three months.

#### **4.5.2 Document Analysis**

Document analysis involves examining and interpreting data to extract meaning, gain insight, and expand the knowledge base (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007). Organisational and institutional documents have long been integral to qualitative research, offering context and depth that other methods may not capture (Bowen, 2009). In this study, document analysis was

employed to complement the data obtained through interviews, particularly in understanding the regulatory and organisational frameworks influencing the gig economy in SA. By integrating these documents into the research, a more nuanced understanding of the policies and regulations affecting Saudi female drivers was achieved.

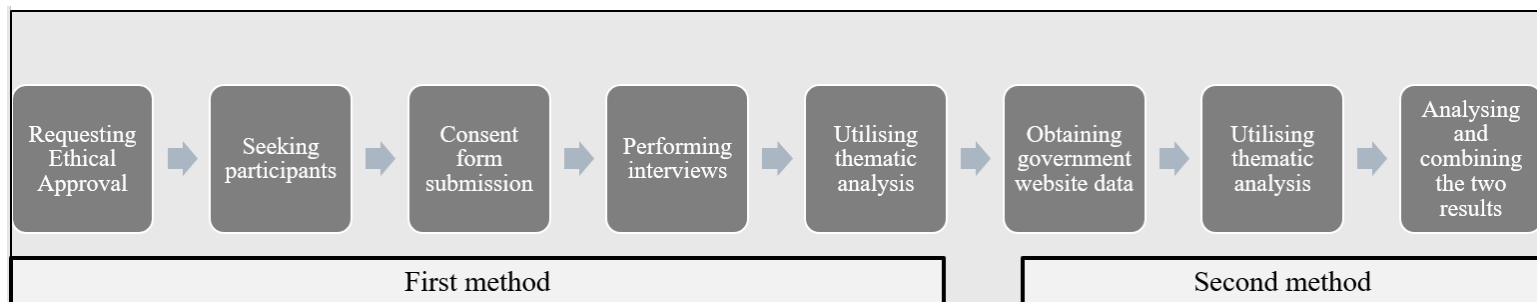
The documents analysed in this study included a range of sources from key governmental and regulatory bodies, such as the MHRSD, Hadaf, TGA, and FWC. These documents were selected for their relevance to the research questions and their potential to provide insights into the policies, regulations, and organisational practices that shape the experiences of Saudi female drivers in the gig economy. For instance, policy documents from the MHRSD provided crucial background information on gender employment policies, while reports and guidelines from Hadaf and the TGA offered insights into operational standards and support systems for drivers. The inclusion of diverse documents ensured a comprehensive analysis of the institutional and organisational influences on the gig economy.

Building on the inductive approach used in content analysis, the inductive thematic analysis enabled a deeper understanding of how institutional and organisational documents reflect and influence the realities of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing industry (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This inductive process involved systematically reading and coding the documents to identify key themes related to the research objectives. As themes emerged, they were organised into broader categories, such as governmental policies on female employment, operational challenges within the gig economy, and the role of organisational practices in shaping driver experiences. This approach allowed for a flexible yet structured analysis that could adapt to the nuances of the data.

This method was particularly useful in uncovering underlying assumptions, values, and biases present in these documents, which might not have been apparent through interviews alone.

Moreover, the use of document analysis helped address some ethical concerns associated with other qualitative approaches, making it a potentially low-risk strategy for gathering sensitive information (Morgan, 2022; Goldstein, 2014). The combination of these methods provided a robust framework for exploring the intersection of policy and practice in the gig economy. The integration of document analysis with interviews provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic, allowing for triangulation of data sources and enhancing the overall credibility of the study (Patton, 2015). By cross-referencing findings from both methods, inconsistencies could be identified and addressed, strengthening the validity of the conclusions drawn. The next subsection will delve into how the data collected through these two methods (interviews and documents) were analysed to draw meaningful conclusions.

*Figure 9: Outline of the research methods*



## 4.6 Data Analysis

The term ‘data analysis’ describes the process of taking raw data and turning it into meaningful conclusions (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define qualitative analysis as the process of systematically organising, reducing, categorising, synthesising and interpreting data to identify themes and draw conclusions. There are several approaches to analysing qualitative data, but all begin with direct interaction with the information to better understand its ‘essence, meaning, norms... rules, patterns’ (Rapley, 2016, p. 332; Stake, 1995). Researchers should choose a data analysis method that can be adapted to their specific

questions and data, as stressed by Stake (1995) and Braun and Clarke (2006). Thus, the goal of data analysis is to imbue the data with significance by subdividing it into topics and drawing connections between various ideas (Gray, 2014).

It is imperative to acknowledge the divergent perspectives within the qualitative research community concerning the utilisation of software in the analytical process. While some scholars advocate for the indispensability of software, others argue that its use is negligible and could even lead to flawed analysis (Welsh, 2002). In this study, the collected data underwent manual analysis for several reasons. Firstly, reliance on qualitative data analysis software might not only restrict researchers from identifying codes within the dataset but could also result in the oversight of other forms of relationships present in the data. This approach, pioneered by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and subsequently refined by Strauss and Corbin in 1998, confines researchers to identify codes solely within the dataset, potentially neglecting other relational intricacies embedded within the data. For instance, while the software might effectively detect and code instances where participants discuss physical symptoms or emotional challenges, it might fail to capture subtler interactions or underlying themes that permeate various sections of the interviews.

Without careful attention to the broader context and deeper meanings embedded in the data, the researcher risks overlooking important information and relationships. For instance, they may miss the interconnectedness between participants' emotional well-being and their experiences of social support or fail to recognise the complex dynamics between symptom management and quality of life. Thus, while qualitative data analysis software can facilitate the initial coding and organisation of data, researchers must remain vigilant to ensure that they do not become overly reliant on predefined codes and categories. They should actively engage with the data, supplementing software-generated insights with their own interpretive skills and critical thinking to uncover the full richness and complexity of the participants' experiences.

Secondly, qualitative research software, including computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) programmes, does not supplant the researcher's pivotal role in the analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) underscore the researcher's centrality as the primary instrument in qualitative research analysis. They further assert that CAQDAS programmes, along with other analytical software such as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and Statistical Analysis System, do not conduct data analysis autonomously; rather, these tools aid researchers in their analytical pursuits (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Indeed, CAQDAS lacks the capacity to autonomously discern categories, make coding decisions, or elaborate on the interpretation of analytical outcomes (García-Horta & Guerra-Ramos, 2009). Hence, it is imperative not to harbour unrealistic expectations regarding its utility. The subsequent subsection will delve into determining the type of data analysis for this study.

#### **4.6.1 Thematic Analysis**

The term ‘thematic analysis’ refers to a method used to identify, analyse and present themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Due to its versatility and broad applicability, it has become widely recognised as the primary approach for qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Sandelowski, 2010). Therefore, thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the interviews performed for this study, aligning with Alhojailan’s (2012) suggestion that thematic analysis is particularly suitable for qualitative research. Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) recommendations, thematic analysis was conducted as outlined in Table 10. The implementation of these procedures in the present study is also outlined below.

***Table 10: Six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)***

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Thematic analysis phases</b>	<b>Process description</b>
	Data familiarisation	- The data was transcribed from audio recordings, ensuring accuracy.

1		Transcriptions were verified against the original files. The content was reviewed for significant patterns. Key themes were extracted for analysis.
2	Code generation	- Codes were systematically allocated by highlighting and noting data extracts. Data related to each code was collected.
3	Theme hunting	- Codes were systematically posted, followed by a meticulous sorting process into potential themes.
4	Theme review	- Data extraction and theme matching were conducted, followed by mapping potential themes.
5	Theme identification	- The excerpts for each theme were read to ensure internal cohesion, consistency, and uniqueness, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 96). Themes were then meticulously verified by referencing recordings and transcripts against the thematic map, ensuring accurate identification. Subsequently, themes and data extracts were reorganised as necessary.
6	Reporting	- The final theme analysis was connected to the research question and existing

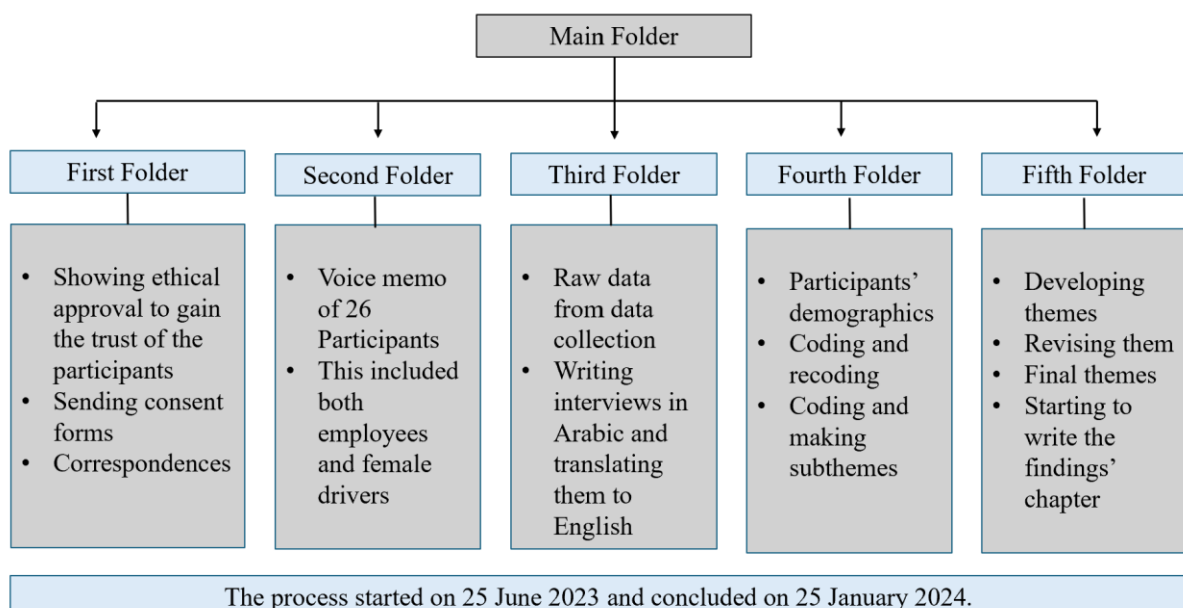


		literature. Next, the results of the data analysis were written.
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### - **Becoming Familiar with the Data**

During this stage, the objective was to familiarise myself with the data by reading and reviewing it, leading to the generation of preliminary conclusions for potential codes and themes. Notes were also taken to capture initial thoughts on themes and codes, which would be used in subsequent stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each interview was carefully listened to, transcribed, and translated. This facilitated a deeper engagement with the data, providing additional material for analytical conclusions. Furthermore, the transcriptions were reviewed and revisited, enabling the identification of patterns, potential codes, and overarching themes throughout the data collection and analysis process. The files and documents were classified and organised to streamline processes, as depicted below.

**Figure 10:** Sequential steps in qualitative data analysis: transcription, coding, theme identification, and analysis



### - **Initial Code Generation**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), data should be categorised according to research objectives. At this stage, any codes that emerged were treated as categories rather than themes. Not all data were categorised; only relevant information pertaining to the research topic or questions was included. The raw qualitative data was analysed and categorised manually, as mentioned previously. While manual analysis may demand more time and effort than utilising software tools, it allows researchers to engage deeply with their data and cultivate crucial analytical skills. Furthermore, the manual analysis offers greater flexibility and adaptability, making it a valuable approach in qualitative research.

Following the coding approach and strategy selection, an open inductive coding procedure was launched to make it possible for the data to offer insights (Bryman, 2004). In the initial phases of the study, preliminary patterns and codes were generated. The coding process followed an iterative and continuous approach, wherein transcriptions were consistently analysed as new codes emerged. Nevertheless, when the data was very close to being saturated during the last interviews, no more codes were introduced. Figure 11 outlines the process of extracting codes from interview data.

**Figure 11:** Examples of data extraction and coding

Data extract	Translate	Coded for
أشعر بالسعادة والفخر بأني امرأة لديها عائلة تخاف عليها وترعاها، أحياناً أفهم سبب قلقهم على وأنا أتفق معهم لأنني لو كنت مكانهم لفعلت نفس الشيء مع أطفالي. وفيما يتعلق بالعوامل الأخرى مثل العوامل الدينية، أعني أن هذا شيء نشأنا عليه.	I feel blessed and proud that I am a woman who has a family that fears for her and takes care of her, I sometimes understand why they are worried about me as I agree with them because if I were them, I would do the same with my children. Regarding the other factors such as the religious factors, I mean, this is something we grow up with.	Gratitude and pride in family support  Understanding and agreement with concerns  Religious and cultural influence

#### - Theme Hunting

In this phase, themes were identified by integrating codes into potential themes, prioritising themes over individual codes, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). A comparison was made between the codes created in the previous stage, after which they were categorised into relevant themes. This process resulted in identifying themes linked to the codes derived from data extraction. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation, codes that did not clearly align with any specific theme were temporarily categorised as 'others/miscellaneous'. Additionally, specific codes were assigned to the 'other codes' category. The following list presents the probable themes that emerged from this phase.

**Table 11:** Emerging themes resulting from the coding processes

Themes				
Culture	Influences of family	Society's acceptance	Personal influence	Passengers' impact
Influences of religion	Safety concern	Policies and empowerment	Other codes	Apps' effects

## **- Reviewing the Themes**

In accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation for ensuring theme validity and thematic map correctness, the refinement process in this study involved a meticulous revision of all themes using the entire dataset. At this stage, the focus was on honing the concepts identified in the preceding analysis. By dissecting the economic changes and other coded topics, the initial pool of ten themes was streamlined to a more concise set of five robust themes. Furthermore, certain additional codes underwent relocation to better integrate with the evolving thematic structure. Through careful examination and adjustments to specific themes, a clearer delineation of code placement emerged. Notably, accommodation issues were reassigned from the generic 'other codes' category to the more contextually relevant domain of 'daily life arrangements.' Additionally, the category originally labelled as 'rules and policies' underwent a renaming process to accurately reflect the operational practices observed at the organisational level, thereby fostering greater alignment with the overarching findings.

Significant effort was invested in refining the final themes, taking into account the research questions, aims and objectives. Additionally, an extra layer of depth was added by asking unconventional questions related to the themes, such as: Does this theme transcend mere categorisation? Does it encompass multiple categories or aspects? How does the theme directly address the research questions? Are there overlaps or intersections between themes that warrant further exploration? Is there substantial evidence to support the existence of the theme across the data? Is the theme sufficiently focused to provide meaningful insights, or is it overly broad and in need of refinement? These considerations helped ensure that the resulting themes accurately captured the essence of the data and effectively addressed the research objectives.

**Table 12: Final themes**

Themes				
Self-discovery and personal growth	Usage of variety of apps	Interacting with passengers	Socio-cultural-religious influences	Government Support

**- Conceptualising and Designating Themes**

The purpose of establishing and defining the themes was to clarify the fundamental nature of each research subject and outline the expected categories of data included within each theme. Throughout the fifth phase, themes were identified and bestowed with names, a process that necessitated ongoing analysis and refinement of the constituent elements comprising each theme. Central to this process was Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation to meticulously analyse the collected data for each topic, discerning the intriguing aspects and understanding the factors influencing them. Subsequently, in the sixth step, the researcher elucidated the findings and compiled the report, with the study's themes and their definitions detailed in Table 13 (see Appendix 10 for the thematic mapping, p. 428).

**Table 13: Designation for each theme**

Themes	Definitions
<b>Self-discovery and personal growth</b>	This theme encapsulates the subjective experiences and viewpoints of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing service, comprising their opinions, attitudes, skills, thoughts, motivations and emotional responses. It also encompasses reflections on newfound confidence, independence and the acquisition of new skills or perspectives

	resulting from their involvement in ride-hailing work, as well as the challenges and hardships they face as drivers.
<b>Usage of a variety of apps</b>	This theme focuses on the multitude of applications employed by Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing service. It explores their use of various platforms, showcasing their adaptability and skill in navigating multiple apps to enhance their experience working as drivers and capitalise on opportunities. Additionally, it examines the distinctions between female-specific and unisex apps, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of each.
<b>Interacting with passengers</b>	This theme encompasses the interactions of Saudi female drivers with their passengers during rides. It includes the various ways they communicate, engage and handle interactions with passengers, reflecting their interpersonal skills, communication strategies and the nature of their relationships with passengers throughout the journey.
	This theme delves into the socio-cultural and religious factors that influence Saudi female drivers' experiences in the ride-hailing

<b>Socio-cultural and religious influences</b>	<p>service. It covers the impact of societal norms, cultural expectations and religious beliefs on their decision to participate in this industry, as well as how these influences shape their behaviour, interactions and perceptions within the context of their work as ride-hailing drivers.</p>
<b>Government support</b>	<p>This theme encompasses the support and initiatives provided by the government to facilitate and encourage Saudi women's participation in the ride-hailing sector. It includes policies, regulations, incentives and other forms of assistance aimed at promoting and empowering women to engage with this sector. Additionally, it explores the impact of government support on the experiences, opportunities and challenges faced by Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing industry.</p>

#### - **Producing the Report**

During the final phase of this procedure, a comprehensive synopsis of the entire study was produced by integrating the outcomes of the analysis with relevant literature and aligning them with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The intricate narratives of the participants were presented to validate the study's credibility and significance. In the findings chapter, all topics were introduced, and each theme was explained, accompanied by a quotation for each

subject. However, it may be more efficient to omit the phrase 'since each phrase is self-explanatory,' as it is redundant. The narrative for the analysis write-up was directly derived from the data, incorporating data excerpts to provide a coherent, distinctive, and logical interpretation of the narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## **4.7 Research Quality**

### **4.7.1 Trustworthiness of the Interviews**

According to Kirk and Miller (1986), the dependability and validity of a study are crucial factors in determining its robustness and solidity. The objective of this research was to provide well-founded, reliable, and credible results by examining the perspectives of Saudi women employed as drivers for ride-hailing applications. Echoing the importance of reliability and validity, the term 'trustworthiness' in qualitative research originally indicated the belief that study results accurately mirror participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To be deemed trustworthy meant convincingly demonstrating that the study results merited attention, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—for assessing the reliability of qualitative research, which are detailed in this section.

#### **- Credibility**

Ensuring credibility was paramount in this research, achieved through the utilisation of multiple data collection methods. Following recommendations from Creswell and Poth (2016) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011), employing both content analysis and in-depth interviews bolstered the study's findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Member checking, conducted to validate the accuracy of interpretations, further enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings, as advocated by Creswell and Creswell (2017). The rigorous application of established qualitative research principles throughout the study process also



contributed significantly to ensuring the credibility and reliability of the research outcomes, as noted by Patton (2015).

Researchers aiming to conduct case studies can employ various strategies, such as using different methods to establish trustworthiness, as recommended by Stake (1995). Cross-referencing data from different methods enhances credibility, aligning with the insights of Rossman and Wilson (1985). Yin (2013) further suggests integrating multiple data sources, like interviews and content analysis, into case study analysis to bolster data reliability. Additionally, juxtaposing findings with existing literature and scrutinising the rigour and quality of research data and findings, as highlighted by Gray (2014) and Shenton (2004), enhances credibility, especially when interviews are conducted with diverse stakeholders. Furthermore, establishing transparency in the research process by documenting methodological decisions and procedures, as emphasised by Tracy (2010), contributes significantly to the credibility of the study. Lastly, member checking, where participants review and confirm the accuracy of their contributions, also plays a crucial role in enhancing the credibility of the findings and interpretations, aligning with the insights of Creswell and Miller (2000).

Denzin (2013) suggests four ways to triangulate data: theories, techniques, the use of different types of data and the use of different researchers. Therefore, obtaining many answers from multiple people is a viable research method because it gives a solid and clear rationale for the data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Further, the supervisor's insightful comments allowed the work to be fine-tuned and solidify the arguments (Shenton, 2004). By providing factual data, themes, and data analysis to colleagues and coworkers, the study was also ensured to undergo peer assessment (Shenton, 2004).

#### **- Transferability**

In this qualitative inquiry, ensuring transferability, also referred to as generalisability, was of utmost importance. Evaluating transferability entails determining the extent to which the research findings can be applied beyond the original study context (Polit & Beck, 2010). Although qualitative research typically does not prioritise generalisation, the ability to transfer findings to other settings is essential when assessing the quality of research (Schwandt, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1979; Given, 2008). For this study, transferability was enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the research setting and phenomena under investigation. Ultimately, the quality of this qualitative research was evaluated based on its potential applicability to diverse contexts, as outlined in the research methodology through descriptions of data collection methods, participant demographics, and the overall study framework.

#### **- Dependability**

Dependability, as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1989), pertains to the consistency of data over time, essentially equating to reliability. This ensures that the data is collected uniformly, without inadvertent influences that could alter its nature (Long & Johnson, 2000). Qualitative researchers should maintain the original meanings of reliability and validity rather than assigning them new terminology. Cultivating dependability involved meticulously documenting all aspects of the study, including interview protocols, audio recordings, transcripts, ethical approval, raw data from social media and contracts, analytical notes, intercoder reliability assessments, and the challenges encountered. This rigorous approach aimed to uphold the integrity and trustworthiness of the research findings by adhering to the highest standards of academic rigour expected at the doctoral level.

#### **- Confirmability**

The term 'confirmability' refers to ensuring that the results of a study are derived from the data provided by informants rather than from the preconceptions or assumptions of the researcher

(Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Researchers should strive for impartiality despite their ideological inclinations, interests, and other predispositions (Misco, 2007). To ensure that the study was data-driven, personal biases were avoided during the data analysis process, which required an awareness of biases, assumptions, and prejudices, as well as measures to limit their influence on the study's results. Miles and Huberman (1994) observed significant confirmability when researchers disclose their predispositions. To achieve confirmability in this study, various strategies were employed, such as maintaining detailed records of research procedures, keeping an audit trail of decisions made throughout the research, engaging in reflexivity to acknowledge and address personal biases, and using multiple researchers and peer debriefing to verify the findings. Implementing these measures enhanced the objectivity and credibility of this study, ensuring that the conclusions are grounded in the data rather than subjective viewpoints.

#### **4.8 Ethical Considerations and Approval**

According to Blumberg et al. (2005), ethics represent moral standards and norms that govern how one should act. Bryman (2015) lists four criteria essential to proper research: participant safety, honesty, confidentiality and informed consent. In this study, consent forms were required, along with the approval of the university's research ethics officer. Signed consent forms were gathered through the university's self-service portal. Once the participants' consent was received, data collection began. Permission from the University of Reading and participants' consent were the only permissions needed for this research.

##### **4.8.1 Informed Consent Form**

Consent forms the cornerstone of mutual understanding between the researcher and participants, wherein both parties affirm their commitment to predefined actions throughout the research process (Faden et al., 1986). Participants were given comprehensive information about the research, enabling them to make an informed decision regarding their participation.

This included details about the study's objectives, time commitment, voluntary nature of participation and whether their involvement was obligatory (Gray, 2014). Because the consent process aims to foster trust, researchers prioritise transparency and honesty with participants (Sanchini et al., 2016), as echoed by Resnik (2018), who emphasises that consent is pivotal in establishing and assuming trust. Authorisation was sought from government bodies to contact their employees and extend invitations via email. Prospective participants also received informational materials and consent forms either through email or on various social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Before the interview, each participant was required to sign a consent form (see Appendix 7, p. 424), which delineated clearly the objectives and timeline of the study in Arabic.

#### **4.8.2 Participant Privacy**

Researchers should keep subjects' information private to show them respect, keep them safe, and earn their confidence (Resnik, 2018). Participants provided their informed consent before data collection began, and they were assured of their right to withdraw from the research at any time and refuse to answer any question. Additionally, participants were informed that their legal names were not required, and aliases provided by each participant would be used when referring to them in the study. Prior approval was obtained from each participant before presenting any findings from the study at a professional conference or submitting any research articles for publication.

#### **4.8.3 Risk and Deception Avoidance**

Risk in scientific inquiry can take many forms, notably physical, mental or emotional (Gray, 2014). The researcher should thus aim to maximise the study's advantages while minimising its hazards. In light of this, participants were requested to provide their signatures on the permission and consent form prior to the interview to ensure they were aware of the time

demands involved. Importantly, interactions not directly related to the study goal were gently avoided. To help participants feel more comfortable, face-to-face interviews were not insisted upon; each interview could be conducted face-to-face, online using Zoom, Microsoft Teams or similar software or by telephone.

Researchers who present their findings in a misleading manner are considered to have fooled (Gray, 2014). To ensure transparency and avoid any misconceptions, interviewees were informed in advance that the discussions could last for 40 to 60 minutes. If informed consent was given, interviewees were informed that their interviews would be audiotaped. Additionally, they were informed that their observations would be labelled using pseudonyms and that only the researcher could access their data. All interviewees had to consent before the content analysis could begin. Researchers are barred from using procedures harmful to themselves or their subjects (Gray, 2014). By adhering to this principle, researchers can prevent potential physical, psychological, or emotional harm during the research process. This commitment helps to maintain trust between researchers and participants and upholds the ethical nature of the research endeavour.

## **Chapter 5: Findings Part I – Driver-Level Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter delineates the outcomes of the initial research methodology, reinforced by supplementary documentary analysis. The examination of interviews and documentation within the scope of this investigation yielded five discernible themes. These themes, derived through the analytical process explained in Section 4.6.1 (Methodology), focus on the experiences and perspectives of Saudi female ride-hailing drivers. The first theme presents Saudi female drivers' feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction and their impact on self-development. According to the study's findings, female drivers in SA encounter myriad internal and external factors intricately linked to their engagement in the role. These factors, organised as vocational, practical, social, cultural, religious, and governmental, are presented individually in this chapter. The results provide a comprehensive understanding of Saudi women's experiences as drivers and shed light on interactions with ride-hailing applications, government policies, and clientele, laying the groundwork for the broader institutional and societal discussions in Chapter 6.

### **5.2 Self-Discovery and Personal Growth**

The theme of self-discovery and personal growth revolves around the journey of Saudi women drivers as they explore their own identities, capabilities and aspirations. The sub-themes – satisfaction, commitment to neutrality, sense of dissatisfaction, personality traits, skills and employment gap – contribute to a nuanced understanding of this overarching theme. The participants' main perceptions were not only categorised into these sub-themes but also seen as indicators that add to the comprehension of Saudi women's experiences in ride-hailing services at the drivers' level. Further analysis of this theme will be provided in subsequent sections of the chapter.

### 5.2.1 Satisfaction

The sub-theme of satisfaction entails comprehending the factors that contribute to an individual's sense of fulfilment and satisfaction regarding working as a driver. It includes investigating individual interests, interactions or professional trajectories that are in harmony with one's principles and objectives. In this particular context, Saudi female drivers often derive fulfilment from a feeling of accomplishment, meaning and embracing their true selves, a desirable result of harmonising their behaviour with their values and objectives. For instance, one participant expressed that she persisted in her role as a driver because she was strongly influenced by the positive emotions such as well-being, autonomy and freedom that she associated with her work:

*'I feel good and positive, at least I found peace in what I do, let's not forget that I can work at my own pace, no rush, so it cannot be a negative experience when I have the chance to use my freedom in choosing the time, the place and the clients for me.'* (P4)

Another participant also stressed the comfort and convenience she found while having a suitable profession for additional income with fewer job requirements. She expressed a sense of contentment and happiness in her role, highlighting the flexibility and autonomy associated with working as a driver:

*'Honestly, it is a comfortable profession because, as I said, if I have free time, I just go and work on the app. It is frankly suitable for additional income, having money with fewer job requirements. The most important thing, whenever I feel I want to stop, I just stop. I feel so good and happy because there is no headache behind doing this job.'* (P5)

Besides this sense of freedom, comfort and autonomy, another participant reported feelings of self-reliance and empowerment because she has the agency to choose her path and make her own choices:

*'Without courtesy and without exaggeration, I am living the best days of my life. I am free and strong, look at me, I am trying to handle everything by myself, I don't wait for anyone like was the case before, I do my tasks and duties outside the home alone. I feel independent and empowered as I am relying on myself in everything.'* (P7)

In the context of self-reliance and empowerment, the same participant and two others (P18 and P19) experienced the most fulfilling period of their life. Some participants unreservedly enjoyed a sense of liberation and strength. Notably, they actively took charge of all their responsibilities, both within and outside their home, without relying on others. As individuals go through life, displaying resilience and autonomy in managing different jobs and responsibilities, they feel that this independence greatly adds to their sentiments of self-reliance and empowerment:

*'I do not wait for my husband or sons to take care of me or pick me up from home to go to the mall, grocery or any place.'* (P7)

*'I feel good because I stopped asking my husband for money or waiting for him to give me some money...'* (P18)

*'I am also not depending on anyone's effort or time waiting for people to pick me up or pick my kids up from school.'* (P19)



### 5.2.2 Commitment to Neutrality

This sub-theme concerns individuals' dedication to maintaining a balanced and unbiased perspective in their personal and professional lives. Some participants failed to develop any emotional connection to their experience as drivers or believed that there was nothing significant to highlight. For some reason, two participants did not find anything compelling to stick with or anything to avoid about this job:

*'When I look at this job, I do not feel that I have a very special pleasant or bad experience. I do not think it was either of those things. I would say it is ok and normal. I am not optimistic or pessimistic about it. I just do what I have to do, get the income I want to have and go back home. I think this is the result of being comfortable financially with my family, I mean, I am not like those who have to work, or they are going to suffer.'* (P8)

*'I feel that my experience was ok, nothing crazy about it or very interesting. Seriously, I look at it as a source of income, that's it. No emotions towards anything.'* (P10)

An explanation was provided by one of the participants, who attributed this form of neutrality towards the experience of working as a driver to personal habits or specific preferences. Although the job requires drivers to engage and interact with other people, this participant believed that the reason she is neutral is that she prefers to be alone and work in an isolated environment:

*'I feel nothing, I am also not a very social person, I know that I meet new people in my job, but I do not get involved with anyone no matter what. I enjoy myself a lot when I am alone, so I always try to limit and restrict any conversation with the clients.'* (P20)

### 5.2.3 Sense of Dissatisfaction

The process of self-exploration may include moments of discontent. This may occur due to a discrepancy between the present situation and the expected results. One participant thought that understanding the root causes of dissatisfaction is crucial for effective self-discovery and subsequent growth because dissatisfaction can act as a catalyst for change, prompting individuals to reassess their goals and values. She stressed the importance of working as a driver but reported that the implementation of the idea should have been more precise and professional:

*'The work itself is not bad, but it is the apps or the companies' regulations that make things harder for us as drivers. This job is truly a double-edged sword. On the individual level, I am completely satisfied, but on the professional level, I think we need more time to develop in this field. To be more specific, I have freedom, privacy and flexible income, but it is insufficient income, and losses that may not be compensated are countless, such as delayed customers' rides, cancellations, exposure to fraud and risk in the payment process. I love the idea of working as a driver, but I am not satisfied with what goes on in the environment of these applications.'* (P22)

This dissatisfaction went further, as described by another participant who was unhappy with the treatment of women on the job. She thought that women should be treated differently because they face more pressure than men. This participant asserted that women in the ride-hailing service have particular cultural settings and conservativeness, indicating that these aspects are not adequately considered by the apps. Dissatisfaction with being treated like male drivers despite differences was notable, as was the pressure that women feel but men do not:

*'Working in ride-hailing services can be good, it might be the best for some. But from my experience, I feel that this job can be done in a much better way. There is a lot of criticism towards these apps, and nothing has changed especially about us as women. These apps treat us like male drivers although we are not, we still have our own cultural setting and conservativeness. We have so much pressure, but men do not.'* (P16)

#### **5.2.4 Personality Traits**

This sub-theme delves into the personal development process of Saudi women working as drivers, specifically how they refine and develop particular personality qualities via reflection and experience. One participant thought that recognising and embracing individual traits contributes to a more authentic and fulfilling life. She stated that exploring one's personality traits is a fundamental aspect of self-discovery, which involves identifying both strengths and areas for improvement:

*'Over time, I have built up my self-assurance to the point that I now consider myself to have complete trust in my capabilities. By this, I mean that I am no longer experiencing the same level of fear and anxiety that I had in the past... Working as a driver helped me a lot to discover my best personal qualities.'* (P1)

In the same way, another participant noted improvement in her ability to exercise self-control and increased self-discipline. She stressed that working as a driver is not an easy task due to the interactions with different people that it entails:

*'I have improved my ability to exercise self-control, I am more self-disciplined now. Even though this job does not require much when compared to other jobs, I should be aware that it is not easy. Taking care of people, their timing and arriving is something very serious.'* (P5)

Concerning job demands, difficulty and responsibility for interacting with people, two other participants stated that this occupation is not for those who are easily pushed or weak-willed. They stressed that being confident is essential to success in this field and that there are some personality traits that every driver must have:

*'There is no room in this profession for weak or pushover people. If someone wants to be in this job, they must have a strong personality. For me, I became stricter and more responsible, learning how to drive requires a lot of skills, also working with clients is another matter to consider. Working with the clients makes me appreciate integrity very much. I always ensure that integrity is ready and present in dealing with the clients.'* (P9)

*'I toughened up a lot and evolved into a tough person, yes, I would say that I became gritty. I feel that also I am more responsible. People's timing, picking up and dropping off are my duty to fulfil, it is not easy. Improving my self-esteem in ride-hailing services has helped me a lot to do my job.'* (P8)

These two quotes show that there is a bright side to working as a driver despite the difficulty of the profession; this includes the improvement of self-esteem and the development of grit and increased responsibility. However, two other participants went through the same experience, but their character growth played out differently. They expressed feelings of strength and confidence as a woman doing this job but compared this with the experience of becoming nervous and more anxious:

*'I feel strong as a woman and confident. However, I grew very nervous and became a more anxious person. Dealing with people caused worry. Because we are a huge nation with various tribes and family names, our social norms are varied, thus I'm constantly worried about being late for a pickup, saying something that violates*

*social norms or doing anything inappropriate. Although this is a bad personality trait for a driver, but yeah, I am anxious about socialising. ' (P16)*

*'I dislike ambiguity, even if I became more confident. Facing the unknown of people's treatment and money makes me feel uncomfortable, emotionally unsafe and unsatisfied, but I believe this is natural for those who aspire to be the best. ' (P17)*

These two quotes indicate that the Saudi female drivers were fully aware of the psychological impact of uncertainty and cultural sensitivity when working as drivers because they highlighted discomfort with facing the unknown, particularly regarding how people would treat them, the diversity of social norms and cultural differences and income.

#### **5.2.5 Skills and Abilities**

Skills and abilities refer to the process of discovering and developing one's unique set of competencies. Working as a driver may give Saudi women an opportunity to develop existing skills while also discovering new ones. Some participants who strived to become more capable and versatile reported that their ability to function effectively improved significantly compared to the early days of the experience. They found that the synergy between self-discovered skills and personal growth could enhance their overall sense of achievement. For example, participant P1 highlighted improved focus on the road while driving and maintaining composure under pressure. To be an effective driver, P1 said, one must be able to multitask and concentrate on what is most important at any given time:

*'When picking up my clients, I am able to function well despite having just a limited amount of time to complete a task. Unlike before, now, I am able to focus on the road when driving, maintain my composure while working under pressure, and zero in on the tasks that need to be completed at the appropriate moment. I think this is a very*

*important skill to have because all captains are going to multitask when working as a driver.* ' (P1)

P2 agreed with P2's viewpoint and discussed her own experience as a driver from a different angle. Although P1 did not acknowledge the development of any communication skills over time, P2 recognised the crucial role of strong communication skills, especially when interacting with passengers. She emphasised the conviction that every person must be dealt with uniquely, acknowledging the complexity of this undertaking, especially while driving in challenging traffic or meteorological conditions:

*'It is crucial for me to have strong communication skills since I need to communicate often with the passengers. I believe that I have begun to develop these qualities. The idea is each one must be treated differently, and this is not easy when driving in heavy traffic, on a sunny day or a rainy day, I said this because we as drivers need to multitask and know the differences between each individual while working under pressure.'* (P2)

Among participants who shared the same experience but had different reactions and standpoints, P4 emphasised the expansion of knowledge beyond driving to include mechanical understanding. She stressed the necessity for women drivers to learn what to do in case of a breakdown, even if not performing the actual repairs, to increase confidence and competence while on the job:

*'I started to understand the basics of my vehicle's functionality. Not that I only drive but I learnt how things mechanically work. Although I know the basics, I am not an expert yet. Since driving alone is something new to us as women, I think we must learn what to do in case the car breaks down. We should learn what to do in some*

*situations even if we do not have to fix the car by ourselves. I think this will also increase our confidence in our ability while doing our job.’ (P4)*

For this participant, understanding what to do in various situations, even without personally fixing the car, and driving in easy conditions while simultaneously interacting with passengers increases confidence in her ability to perform the job for many reasons. Initially, as stated in the aforementioned quotation, working as a driver not only emphasises the need for women to acquire additional knowledge and personal skills due to this new responsibility but also underscores the practical aspect of preparedness. In addition to the practical aspect, there is also a psychological and moral aspect to creativity in dealing with clients, such as recognising individual differences to become a more effective communicator. It is crucial for each passenger to be treated uniquely, and Saudi female drivers are aware of this. Learning beyond traditional gender roles, such as driving alone, enhances the level of trust in Saudi women’s competence. Acquiring both practical skills and knowledge will have a beneficial effect on their experiences.

### **5.2.6 Employment Gap**

The last sub-theme in the overarching topic of self-discovery and personal improvement focuses on how some participants look at their jobs as informal occupations. An employment gap<sup>4</sup> may be a crucial component of the process of self-discovery, particularly if it is the consequence of pauses taken voluntarily for the sake of personal growth. On the contrary, this period might give participants a chance to acquire new skills, re-evaluate job objectives and explore alternate interests. However, several participants indicated that working as a driver was not their preferred occupation, but it was their only choice due to the specific circumstances of

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<sup>4</sup> An employment gap is a period of time when an individual is not employed. This period is commonly regarded as a transitory stage preceding the attainment of a more preferable or fitting occupation. It can be utilised for personal development, acquiring fresh competencies, or reevaluating career goals (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996)

the work environment. For example, the lack of a desired or ideal profession was brought to light by P12, who spoke of restricted career possibilities and cultural standards, which constrained her emotional experience:

*'While I wasn't compelled to work as a driver, I also couldn't find any other suitable employment opportunities that aligned with my preferences. Working as a driver was not my lifelong aspiration, and I felt that I had limited options available to me at that time. My work prospects are severely restricted as a result of cultural conventions.'*  
(P12)

In the same vein as P12, P2 and P9 argued that seizing such employment opportunities does not contribute to their professional advancement because the experience gained may not be transferable to other jobs:

*'It cannot replace traditional jobs no matter what. In other words, can I build my future from working as a driver through these apps? I do not think so. Can I get promoted and high positions on these apps? I do not think so. What career improvement or progress did I get from doing this? Nothing. To sum up, what will the experience of driving add if I put it on my CV when applying for a big and professional job? Literally nothing.'* (P2)

*'I can't imagine the idea of becoming a freelancer would replace the primary profession, the main and core job I mean, temporary work is useful for daily and easy expenses.'* (P9)

These quotations demonstrate not just the constraints of professional advancement but also the uncertainties surrounding conventional job replacement. P20 echoed the concern about the trustworthiness of outcomes and income stability from driving gig jobs. She pointed out that



the lack of stable and regular earnings as a driver for these applications prevents individuals from becoming wealthy and limits their capacity to afford personal desires and necessities:

*'It is not a job whose outcomes I can trust all the time. In other words, this job does not make you rich or at least give you a stable income. As a normal person, I do not think this job can buy all I want and need. The job also has some positive aspects, but its negatives are much greater. What makes driving a competitive and compelling job is the other factors, such as social media, people's support and networking; other than that, this type of work does not make a living.'* (P20)

### **5.2.7 Summary**

The study delved into the experiences of Saudi women working as ride-hailing drivers, revealing a complex narrative of self-discovery and personal growth. Through sub-themes like satisfaction, commitment to neutrality and a sense of dissatisfaction, it explored their feelings of fulfilment, neutrality and occasional discontent. The narratives also uncovered how driving influences personality traits and enhances skills while highlighting concerns about employment gaps and lack of professional growth. Overall, it offered insights into the nuanced experiences of Saudi female drivers, underscoring both the positive aspects and the challenges in their unique context.

### **5.3 Usage of a Variety of Apps**

Trying various applications and determining their appropriateness and suitability was another prominent element that was always discussed by the participants. This is influenced by whether or not there are certain expected benefits to working as a driver through ride-hailing apps. Several participants reported that their decision to use a particular app was influenced by several considerations, such as cultural, religious, economic and, ultimately, professional

concerns. They explored how apps have transformed everyday life, from meeting daily needs to entertainment, and highlighted the convenience these apps offer them and their families.

### 5.3.1 Unisex Apps

A multitude of participants scrutinised the characteristics and functionalities of various applications, examining possible obstacles or advantages linked to gender-specific apps. They discovered that female-centric applications provide more autonomy, privacy and financial independence than other well-known apps such as Uber and Careem, which excel in professionalism, quality and fulfilling customers' requests. Several participants evaluated multiple ride-hailing applications and emphasised the high level of professionalism shown by gender-neutral apps such as Uber and Careem. P8, P9 and P10 recognised professionalism as a distinguishing feature of Uber and Careem in terms of physical offices for visits, communication support services and incentives, in contrast to female-centric apps:

*'I have to say Uber and Careem, their professionalism is on another level for everything. At least, they have offices you can visit and finish the business, unlike some other apps like Wsslini where the communication is only via the internet.'* (P8)

*'For me, frankly, Careem is excellent in terms of incentives and communication support, Uber is the same, they are very professional, and they are quick to respond.'* (P9)

*'I worked with the Careem, Uber and Wsslini apps. Careem and Uber are at the top in terms of professionalism, they have offices to visit and great customer service.'* (P10)

Despite the overall professionalism of Uber and Careem, female drivers in SA faced specific issues or challenges. P7 stated that she perceived an imbalance between commission fees and income, with an unstable commission percentage:

*'I also worked with the Careem app but the issue with them is that the commission fee is very high for me, it is high while the income is low. The percentage is not stable, that's why I am not sure. I think it is between 25% and 35%. However, Careem is still a wonderful company.'* (P7)

Female drivers' unwillingness to work for Uber and Careem was highlighted by P10, who cited the high commission fee and what is perceived as excessive control over drivers' work as the main reasons. Additionally, the participant took a guess as to how much Uber, Careem and Wsslini would charge in commission:

*'No female drivers are going with Uber and Careem anymore because of the commission fee of Uber and Careem and their excessive control over the work. Regarding the percentage, I almost expect Uber [to take] 45%, Careem I expect 38% and Wsslini is more than 20%, but I'm not sure.'* (P10)

Regarding interference with drivers' work, P11 spoke of losses due to changes in drop-off points because the requirement to inform Careem about clients' drop-off point changes impacts the driver's earnings because drivers get paid only for a certain number of kilometres per ride:

*'I have to tell the Careem app if the client changes the drop-off point because each trip has limited kilometres, where they do not count the extra miles; in this position, I am losing, I am stuck between the client's request and the mercy of the app.'* (P11)

Uber, Bolt and Jeeny are not exempt from problems, with P9 and P7 highlighting issues related to customer interactions, the visibility of customer data, the lack of destination information and challenges with personal preferences as a female driver:

*'Uber and Jeeny were the worst for me, they were not good in terms of dealing with customers. Jenny is better, of course, the moment I turn on the app, I receive a lot of requests, I also can see the customer's data. Uber does not show you the customer's*

*destination, I just had to take them and go, which is bad. I do not want to go far away from my area. Uber also interferes with my personal choices; as a driver, I chose the feature of dealing with female passengers only and yet I see requests from male passengers.’ (P9)*

*‘Bolt has stolen my money in the wallet app... I had some money in the wallet, they just took it. I tried to get it back, but I could not. They give silly excuses such as “we did this to keep it for you later” or “this is for the app update” or “we took the money in order to receive an offer”. I was like, are you serious guys? They stole my wallet like seven times. I am done with them.’ (P7)*

Moving on to a different perspective, all the participants who worked with unisex apps were threatened with exclusion and suspension because of cancellation decisions based on the gender of the passenger. Saudi female drivers who worked with unisex apps did not pick up male passengers, believing that this action contradicts their culture and social and religious customs. The only reason why these participants joined unisex apps is that they wanted to increase their financial opportunities, which female apps cannot achieve. P16 and P10 explained:

*‘Careem is good, but the issue is my cancellation rate is very high, my account is threatened with suspension. If I saw the person making the request was a guy, I would cancel it. I am very conservative, and I don’t want to pick up men. I worked on these apps because I just want to have extra income, that’s it.’ (P16)*

*‘I joined Uber and Careem to have more income with a reservation not to deal with men...’ (P10)*

Even after the participants were asked about Uber’s female-only feature, where women drivers have the option to signal a preference for female passengers only, P10 and P20 stated:

*'I expect this feature to be working but I don't know, because I ask my clients if you can choose women, they say never.'* (P10)

*'I heard that this is not always the case, people can put their preference but there is a big chance they meet the other gender, I mean male passengers.'* (P20)

### **5.3.2 Women-Centric Apps**

Multiple participants indicated that picking up only female passengers was a motivation for working with women-centric apps. These Saudi women often considered that working as a driver would align with the expectations of the conservative society and provide overall benefits for women without any complications. This is due to the prevalence of women-centric applications in SA, such as Wsslini, Leena, Amnuh and Nawaaem, which serve as platforms for female drivers. Every participant who mentioned this aspect regarded it as secondary, supporting family approval, which was considered the more significant element. As P3 articulated:

*'Other apps include men and women, but I only want to pick up ladies, so I became a driver. Only female applications like Wsslini can provide this. I won't compromise my safety and culture for money or what is called independence.'* (P3)

This quote shows how important values are. In terms of dependence on female ride-hailing apps, clear boundaries and the non-negotiable women-only stance, P20 also stated:

*'Basically, you will not find me working as a driver if there are no female ride-hailing apps. Meeting or picking up guys is a red line for me that I am not going to cross.'* (P20)

In the same way, P19's answers showed not only the influence of peer recommendations and family considerations but also the perceived advantages of Wsslini and her positive emotions in deciding to work with this app:

*'My friends who work as drivers told me I wouldn't have to worry about upsetting my family because I will only pick up women, so I thought it was the best choice for me to work with the Wsslini app and I feel good about how I made the decision.'* (P19)

Despite participants' preference for female ride-hailing apps, they often voiced complaints about the latter's level of professionalism, difficulties with preserving their rights when getting paid, cancellation issues and dealing with scammers. P2 was frustrated because Wsslini raised its commission fee without informing her ahead of time. She found the lack of notification rude and unprofessional:

*'20% of each trip is paid to the app. We were super angry at the Wsslini app because the commission fee was 15% and they raised it without informing us, it is very unpleasant and unprofessional. When I said or expressed my emotion by saying "this is sad", I meant that female passengers complain about the high price thinking that all the money goes to our account, which is not true, we also complain about the high commission fees and low income from doing this job.'* (P2)

This quote shows that participants perceived the rise in commission fees as unfair, asserting that it hurt both drivers and female customers. The participant also cleared up a misconception of some female customers, pointing out that when the latter complain about high prices, they think that all the money goes to the driver, whereas a percentage is taken by the app as a fee. In the next subsection, I will explore the other factors affecting the participants' work as female drivers in SA.

### 5.3.3 Payment Methods

One of the most reported issues with female apps, especially Wsslini, was the different payment methods integrated into the app, such as credit/debit cards, mobile wallets and cash. Some drivers hardly got paid for providing services to the clients. E1, who works for FWC, stated that offering different payment methods is always good and gives a competitive advantage to the companies, which benefits the drivers:

*'We always encourage ride-hailing companies to contribute positively to the drivers' experience and we can see that some companies are competing with each other in facilitating multiple payment options.'* (E1)

However, P3 expressed frustration with the unpaid rides, highlighting the emotional impact:

*'Having different methods should be good right? But it is not. When some clients place an order using the app, they ask to pay with cash, but they do not end up paying for their ride. It really grates on my nerves because not all trips are short trips.'* (P3)

P6 talked about how the Wsslini app works in terms of payment methods. She brought up problems with cash payments, such as people saying they do not have cash but promising to transfer money through the bank:

*'The Wsslini app has different ways for the clients to pay. There are three options. Some women upload their card information to the app; whenever they arrive, the money gets deducted. Second, some women top up their wallet in the app, it is like paying for 10 trips at once; whenever they arrive, the money also gets deducted from the wallet, they already paid. The last option is paying in cash, and this is between me and the customer. Some customers with the latter say stuff like "I do not have the cash; I will transfer the money via the bank". The issue when you say yes to the money transfer [is that] they say stuff like "I do not have Wi-Fi or internet to send*

*you the money now, wait for me”; in this case, I have to give her Wi-Fi for the transfer. It is a very bad thing for us to go through all of this.’ (P6)*

This quote shows that despite the driver’s assertiveness, notable trust issues have developed, leading P6 to be more self-assured and cautious, even refusing customers to avoid potential non-payment situations. Regarding the application’s position on these undesirable measures for drivers, P13 said:

*‘I feel sad because they [Wsslini] are sometimes dishonest with us. For example, I talked to them on Twitter, and they responded in the nicest way, like “oh, do not worry, we will punish the rider, and you will have your money back”, but guess what? On my Twitter account, in my private messages, the app accuses me and tells me it is my mistake, seriously? In private, they hold us responsible for collecting the money and ask us not to repeat this mistake. It is just nonsense.’ (P13)*

These quotes not only reveal a certain sadness resulting from perceived dishonesty or inconsistency in the communication with the Wsslini app but also shed light on the challenges and complications that drivers may face, particularly with cash payments and clients’ attempts to transfer money. When the participants were asked if the payment issues were resolved, they underlined the notable discrepancy between the app’s public response on Twitter and communications in private messages, creating confusion and frustration for the participants.

#### **5.3.4 Cancellation Issues**

The sub-theme of cancellation issues addresses the regulations and implications associated with cancellation issues, taking into account both the user’s experience and the viewpoint of the service provider. Cancellations can be due to the payment method, pickup address changes or the gender of the passenger. Regarding cancellations due to payment issues, P21 stressed that she adheres to the Wsslini app’s guidelines regardless of how unjust she perceived them to be.



However, she encountered disagreements with clients on payment methods, defending her decision to accept cash as payment because it is a feature offered by the app. In one instance, after the participant requested a cancellation fee from the client, the app disregarded her request and finally stopped helping, leaving her without any compensation for the cancellation:

*'I always try to follow the rules of the app even though they are unfair sometimes. Because of the fairness of the Wsslini app, I was about to pick up my clients but I asked them to pay me cash first so I do not risk my rights, waste my time and lose money; the clients unsurprisingly refused my request, saying that they will only pay using their card. We did not agree, so they forced me to cancel, but I asked the app to give me my cancellation fee since my choice for getting paid is in the available options they offer; they just ignored me until they refused to help.'* (P21)

Cancellations can also occur due to changes in the destination, which can be problematic for female drivers. These changes may force them to cancel or violate protocols, such as promises made to their families not to drive to distant places. P22 highlighted a common coping mechanism for dealing with unhappiness caused by destination changes – ignoring things one does not like, such as driving far. However, despite this coping mechanism, she found herself confused and displeased with cancellation processes, describing them as unclear and unregulated:

*'I just ignore things I do not like. However, I hate the fact that cancellation processes on the Wsslini app are always not regulated or clear; to put it more accurately, I agreed with my husband not to go to specific locations, some clients change their locations, thus, I cancel the request if I do not agree with them, but I do not always get the refund.'* (P22)

Lastly, participants who disputed cancellation fees achieved inconsistent results, particularly using the Wsslini app. On rare occasions, the app's upper management listened and fixed the issue, but this is far from the norm. As a result, the participants were confused about how their disagreements would be resolved, which points to a lack of uniformity and clarity in the procedure. Nevertheless, the seriousness and fairness of the Wsslini app's staff were praised by P9, especially with regard to cancellations for male passengers:

*'Although we have the same issue with male requests, the team management of the Wsslini app does their job trying to protect us. It is just the process that I have to tell them about the issue because they have to fine me first, then, they pay me back after I explain everything to them about the situation.'* (P9)

In contrast, on the unisex apps, cancelling because of the passenger's gender brought the participants numerous problems, such as account closure and exclusion (see the 'unisex app' sub-theme above). Interestingly, women-centric apps do justice to Saudi female drivers and support them, but these drivers nonetheless face dilemmas that lead to unpleasant feelings, such as dissatisfaction with cancellation processes.

### **5.3.5 Dealing with Scammers**

The participants often brought up their experiences with scammers on the Wsslini app; this section discusses the most prevalent forms of fraud on ride-hailing applications. The steps taken by the app management to protect the drivers and combat fraud were discussed by 11 participants in the study. Regarding how scammers take advantage of Saudi female drivers, P1 voiced confusion at how the Wsslini application accommodates orders made with foreign phone numbers and allows scammers to use the system without adequate authentication. She said:

*'I cannot understand how the Wsslini app accepts a client with a fake number [i.e. a scammer], how the system works and accepts all orders with fake or foreign numbers, and the management does not see the location while these unknown people still call and text me on WhatsApp using my private number.'* (P1)

P3 captured the specific challenges faced by drivers like P1 due to scammers using unidentified or counterfeit numbers, stating that these scammers take advantage of the confidence that drivers have in them by making fictitious claims about compensation:

*'These unidentified or counterfeit numbers, of which I am uncertain, send messages to us, the drivers, requesting us to purchase items from a Panda supermarket. They claim that we will be compensated upon picking them up, but it is evident that their true intention is to deceive and rob us.'* (P3)

P5 highlighted her displeasure with the inadequate response of the Wsslini app regarding the issue of scammers and identifying the origin of these phone numbers. She also used proactive precautions by promptly cancelling purchases and removing requests when discovering foreign phone numbers, effectively preventing possible fraudulent activities. Nevertheless, these actions result in a cancellation fee imposed by the application:

*'I can't stand how the app responds... these foreign numbers are from Kenya... I was aware when I got these numbers, so I cancelled the order immediately and deleted the request but guess what? The app charged me 10 riyals, why? I am still waiting after 6–7 months for the problem to be solved...'* (P5)

Like every participant, P16 responded as follows when asked what the app representative responded when she was confronted with these fraudulent requests:

*'Wsslini has done nothing regarding this, and the management team is really bad. They told us to block these international numbers, but how smart is it, I mean, the scammers can come up with different and new numbers.'* (P16)

When asked about the benefits for the fraudsters of purchasing some items, especially when they do not live in any Saudi city, P17 brought up scamming techniques and provided comprehensive explanations of the tactics used by scammers within the Wsslini app's community:

*'These thieves invite us to purchase stuff such as Apple iTunes gift cards and other similar items so that they may get the codes and then ask us to send them to them when we are on our way to pick them up.'* (P17)

### **5.3.6 Working as a Private Driver**

This section explores the experiences and challenges faced by the participants that motivated them to become private drivers through ride-sharing applications. It also examines the aspects of flexibility, earning potential, and concerns regarding safety and security that impact private drivers. Two participants reported actively seeking and creating opportunities beyond the limitations of the application environment to increase their income and extend their professional networks.

*'I am also expanding my chances by working in the same field privately. Passengers get my number; the next day they call me or text me, and we make a deal, without using the app; all is good, and I feel blessed since there is no deficiency or injustice due to the negligence of the app, but thanks to the app that introduced me to these people.'* (P3)

*'I started to work on my own, some people get my number for private trips. This is more relaxing than following the app's rules. It is true that the app sometimes has*

*more chances of getting a lot of requests, but there is a high risk too, I might meet someone bad, get scammed or face the issue of cancellation and not getting paid. I at least have a stable income when I work on my own, and there is no commission fee. To sum up, I trust my private journeys and clients more, to be honest.'* (P7)

Both of these quotes shed light on a thought-provoking aspect, namely, that the participants' experiences influenced their ability to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of using the apps. Although P3 and P4 shared the same concerns about the apps, such as safety, scams and injustice, they were very indebted to the apps that introduced them to the clients with whom they work privately. P8's perspective was comparable to the quotes above; she believed that direct connections with clients were a way of mitigating or compensating for the downsides of the application:

*'I like the feeling of being busy because I did not stop using the app when working with my clients without using the app. I feel that working with clients without relying on the app makes up for the drawbacks of the app, these two methods of working complement each other.'* (P8)

When asked what motivates clients to work directly with her rather than through the app, P13 answered:

*'I think trust is the key to success in making deals outside the app. Once we treat our clients nicely, they trust us. Also, do not forget that we are governed by customs and traditions; once they are generous and polite with me, I trust them as well. The relationship develops until I pick up my client's children from their schools for an agreed-upon monthly amount. This is a feature that I do not find in the app.'* (P13)

### 5.3.7 Desires and Aspirations

The wants and aspirations that the participants expressed regarding the features and functions of the apps are the focus of this section. It is clear that the empowerment of Saudi women through ride-hailing services is a successful project, but implementation requires listening to the drivers to identify shortcomings. Most participants shared the same points of view, with a few diverging. One of the factors they mentioned as areas for improvement and development was changing the peak times. P2 expressed concern about the peak times set by the Wsslini app because she felt that they do not align with local cultures, events and holidays:

*'On the Wsslini app, the only problem was, and I think all the drivers complain about it, that the peak times have not changed based on our cultures, events and holidays. I wish for the management team of the app to understand us at least once. We know better than the app, and I say this without hesitation, why? It is because we are Saudis and we work in the Saudi culture and environment, the place where we grew up, while the management team of the Wsslini app is not Saudi.'* (P2)

In terms of cultural context and identity, understanding the challenges of dealing with non-Saudi management was insightful. However, as P2 noted, P5 expressed a sense of helplessness in the face of the management team's lack of understanding of local concerns:

*'No disrespect, but if the team management or their support team does not understand us for whatever reason, what can I do? Basically nothing, thus, I meant that they should at least listen to us because we know our culture better than anyone. We know what the best time for the peak time is to have extra income, and we know how professional the app is compared to other apps.'* (P5)

The other major wish mentioned by the participants for app improvement was increased professionalism when dealing with the Wsslini app. P1 stressed the need to uphold elevated

levels of professionalism in all facets of the service, suggesting that attending to drivers' rights, customer control and commission fees are essential elements of preserving professionalism:

*'Preserving the rights of the drivers, having control over customers and lowering the commission fee; being professional is everything we need...' (P1)*

Participants demonstrated a comprehensive perspective, wherein they emphasised that professionalism encompasses more than just individual components and is essential for the platform's success. As P1 articulated:

*'I also want to say that we need more female apps that are very active with high female demand. Not only that, they also can be supported by the government to have financial support.'* (P1)

The introduction of a Saudi women-centric app was one of the most frequently cited wishes. Participants P4 and P9 also expressed a need for mobile apps specifically tailored to meet the interests and preferences of Saudi female drivers and passengers. P9 expressed a desire for the necessary funds to be allocated towards developing a new application similar to Careem, Uber, and Wsslini. Meanwhile, P4 stated her preference for a Saudi application over other foreign platforms, recognising the potential success of local applications.

*'I also think that having a Saudi app will be much better than any other app. Leena was amazing but is closed now for some reason. We need a Saudi app that avoids the other apps' mistakes, and I think we will be good.'* (P4)

*'I wish that I were rich so I could make a new app like Careem, Uber and Wsslini. I mean, why aren't there people who want to do this in SA? We have money, time and resources, we can make the best app in the world if we want. I wish someone would come one day and take care of this idea, an app that only targets Saudi women: riders and drivers.'* (P9)

These two quotes provide insights into the participants' views and aspirations surrounding the development of a new application. They encompass not only the particular idea of a women-centric app but also criticism of existing applications, the significance of cultural factors, and the desire for a beneficial societal influence, such as promoting gender equality and empowerment. Regarding Saudi women-centric apps for ride-hailing services, P1, P17, and P18 noted that some of these apps either ceased operations for unknown reasons or are unpopular:

*'I know that there are some female apps such as Leena, Amnuh and Nawaaem, but they are not very famous apps among women. Therefore, I joined and tried other female ride-hailing services apps, but I did not find them as notable as the Wsslini app.'* (P1)

*'Let's stop pretending, we all want to have more money. We find this only on the Wsslini app, the income if we get busy is really good.'* (P17)

*'Wsslini is famous because it was a good app in the beginning; however, we think Leena was the best, but for some reason they stopped.'* (P18)

### **5.3.8 Summary**

The study presented a nuanced exploration of the experiences of female ride-hailing drivers in SA, centred on the theme of the usage of a variety of apps. It delved into sub-themes such as unisex apps, highlighting the challenges faced by drivers using gender-neutral platforms like Careem and Uber, and female apps, which examined the appeal of applications that cater specifically to women drivers, such as Nawaaem and Wsslini. It also addressed issues related to payment methods, cancellation policies, encounters with scammers and the drivers' decision to work independently outside of app settings. The participants expressed wishes for app improvements and a Saudi-centric ride-hailing service. Overall, the section underscored the



complex interplay of cultural, economic and occupational factors influencing Saudi female drivers' use of different ride-hailing applications.

#### **5.4 Interacting with Passengers**

Passengers' reactions, support and interactions with female drivers are the subject of this section. The sub-themes addressed here are not only associated with engaging with passengers but also include several facets of the drivers' occupation, such as clients' support for the drivers, feeling remorse and regret, trust issues, interactions with male passengers, problems with payment and cancellation and safety issues. Addressing these sub-themes comprehensively will contribute to a more holistic understanding of the challenges and dynamics involved in interacting with passengers as a driver. It encompasses both the interpersonal aspects, such as passengers encouraging the Saudi female drivers and the drivers respecting their passengers, and more practical considerations, such as dealing with payment and safety issues.

##### **5.4.1 Encouragement and Support**

The sub-theme of encouragement and support examines the methods by which drivers may promote and aid passengers, including assisting them with baggage, imparting information and displaying a congenial disposition. It also delves into the passengers' responsibility to cultivate a favourable and supportive atmosphere for Saudi female drivers. In the following quote, P3 explains that passengers feel empowered, happy and supportive by the option to choose female drivers:

*'I really like supporting my clients to try new things like working as a driver, and I feel supported by the passengers when they tell me about other job opportunities,*

*there is mutual respect. They think that I am doing a great job picking them up as they are not forced to deal with male drivers.’ (P3)*

Recognising and appreciating favourable remarks and feelings conveyed by passengers, P5 and P7 felt the same about their clients. They received acceptance, passenger support and encouragement as they formed friendships and secured exclusive preference from passengers and monetary appreciation for their professionalism:

*‘I feel empowered by the support of the passengers and feel more respect and love when I treat them well, such as waiting for them to be picked up, I mean I do not rush them, and I advise them about any question they ask. They appreciate the idea that I am driving, and they just treat me very well, to the point that I want to work extra hours.’ (P5)*

*‘I love the fact that some passengers became friends with me, they supported me in the first place by saying things like: “never give up, keep doing this amazing job and we will wait for nobody but you to pick us up,” they also give me extra money for being professional with them.’ (P7)*

Both quotes emphasise the beneficial influence of courteous and encouraging encounters with passengers on the drivers. This transcends the purely transactional aspect of their employment, transforming their activities into more intimate and gratifying encounters where passengers might develop friendships, provide support and express gratitude for the driver’s professionalism and friendliness. These favourable encounters not only amplify the participants’ work satisfaction but also motivate them to exceed expectations in their positions. Surprisingly, participants reported a positive change in men’s behaviour, potentially influenced by the familial context when female drivers pick up their family members, as described by P12:

*'Some are much younger than me, and I do not have kids, so I personally treat them like they are my daughters, they like it. I am even treated better by men when I pick up their families, such as mothers, sisters, kids. They think this job is amazing, saying things like "we need people like you".'* (P12)

This interview excerpt emphasises the beneficial influence of the driver's compassionate and family approach towards passengers, particularly younger ones. Establishing a strong rapport with passengers not only fosters a positive connection but also enhances the public's favourable image of the participants' occupation, as evidenced by the praise they receive from passengers.

#### **5.4.2 Regret and Aggressiveness**

The sub-theme of regret and aggressiveness explores the issues associated with managing troublesome passengers or responding aggressively to passengers' behaviour. Furthermore, it explores the tactics for managing unfortunate circumstances professionally and defusing possible disputes to guarantee a secure and enjoyable experience for everyone involved. Discussing clients' behaviour, P13 strongly disapproved of picking up passengers who display unpleasant attitudes because of the detrimental impact on her stress levels and sense of personal dignity. In addition, she acknowledged the difficulty of anticipating passengers' dispositions until they are physically present in the vehicle, acknowledging the inherent unpredictability in managing a variety of personalities:

*'I hate picking up rude passengers and I feel sorry for my pride if someone hurts my feelings, but no blame because I cannot know these people's attitude until they are in my car already, so, thinking about the nature of clients' behaviour is always very stressful. However, people in general are not bad.'* (P13)

Regarding the potential harm caused by rude clients aside from emotional distress for drivers, participant P15 reported a negative interaction with teenagers in a professional setting. P15 associated feelings of regret with the harsh criticism she received despite her efforts to keep her composure:

*'I picked up some teenagers, they were super rude and did not respect me. They were like this without direct disrespect [i.e. being sarcastic], which I had to stay calm and relaxed; I just regretted more when they gave me a negative review, but all is good, it was only once.'* (P15)

This quote shows not only regret over the review but also a determined and optimistic mindset when confronted with difficulties, with the participant stating that 'all is good'. Speaking of dedication, determination and consistency, P16 reported feeling a little sorry despite the unwanted behaviours, indicating a highly stable and controlled emotional reaction. She also expressed an overall positive and accepting attitude, using the phrase 'all is good', demonstrating acceptance and resilience like P15:

*'Do I have a lot of regret? The answer is no, although there are some behaviours, I dislike very much such as closing the car's door harshly and making me wrong while I am not, all is good though. These mistakes are experiences on which we build a learning bridge to avoid them.'* (P16)

As concerns aggressiveness, P7 threatened one of her clients not to complete their trip in case of lack of discipline. She voiced concern for the children's safety, especially when they tried to unlock the vehicle's doors while it was moving, emphasising safety as an essential aspect of her duty:

*'I told you about the story of the mother and her kids, I had to be upset and angry. The mother did not care about her kids' safety when they tried to open the doors while the car was moving, I was acting like I am the real mother. I do not blame the kids for their misbehaviour but rather the mother for being careless and tactless. Thus, I told her, "If you do not watch your kids, you will be dropped off right now"'. ' (P7)*

Commenting on the mother's apparent disregard for her children's well-being, the participant was understandably distressed and irritated. This quote reflects emotional responses such as upset and angry reactions. However, it's important to note that the drivers consistently made efforts to calm down, demonstrating an awareness of the need for emotional regulation. Both P20 and P22 provided perspectives on the limited value of anger in such situations:

*'Although I get aggressive sometimes at rude clients for arriving late, being rude and requesting a lot of stops such as drive-throughs or convenience stores, I always try to calm myself down because it is not worth it to be angry. To be fair, these kinds of situations are very rare, people in general are nice and wonderful.' (P20)*

*'I do get upset and angry, but not a lot, this happens very rarely, the clients I meet are wonderful. Even when I get aggressive, I swallow my anger and negative words because I do not want to hurt anyone. Clients can go through their own personal issues like us, and we all should treat each other in a friendly manner.' (P22)*

These participants thus demonstrated self-awareness and reported active attempts to manage their emotions while acknowledging that certain behaviours on the part of clients, such as arriving late or being rude, can trigger aggressive responses. Whether the source of this tolerance is cultural or religious, participants described challenging situations with rude clients

or multiple stops as very rare. This emphasises that such instances are not common occurrences; on the contrary, participants expressed a positive view of people in general. The participants themselves encouraged a welcoming and compassionate attitude, seeing common humanity and admitting that clients may be dealing with personal challenges.

### **5.4.3 Trust Issues**

This section delves into the trust relationship between drivers and passengers, examining the actions used by drivers and passengers to develop trust and guarantee a sense of security, support, and motivation. First, the unpredictability and ambiguity of the clients' temperament or mood are some of the factors that undermine the confidence of drivers. In addition, the nature of the work and sharing experiences among drivers leads to the destabilisation of trust between passengers and clients. P3 had certain perspectives regarding trust in individuals, particularly when it comes to unfamiliar clients. She expressed sentiments of unease and apprehension in some circumstances, which may be linked to worries about safety and other concerns such as social or professional reputation.

*'Because some drivers suffer from scammers or men trying to use women-centric apps, I do not trust what my next client will be like, are they good? Bad? I have no clue. Although the majority of people are good, there are some situations where we are nervous and scared as well of the outcomes, I care so much about my reputation and safety.'* (P3)

The statement reflects a lack of trust in the intentions of some clients, especially when men try to use a women-centric app. Thus, the next sub-theme focuses on trust issues due to misuse. Second, lack of trust in receiving payments was one of the factors most frequently mentioned by the participants. P6 and P8 indicated that encounters with clients violating policies or

creating payment uncertainties contributed to the most difficult experiences. Both participants stated apprehensions about the payment reliability of clients, showing a degree of uncertainty:

*‘One of the hardest situations, well, is when someone says, “do not worry about the payment, just drop me off at home and then I will transfer the money to you”, they go home and sadly they pay us nothing.’ (P6)*

*‘The people we suffer with because of payment do not make us trust even the good ones. Some clients pay more money thinking that they are supporting and empowering us while a few others make it hard for us and we wonder whether they will pay or not.’ (P8)*

While participants acknowledged that certain clients pay more to support Saudi female drivers, it became evident through various indicators that payment-related matters, whether positive or negative, significantly affect drivers emotionally. Despite their diverse experiences, participants consistently reported encountering similar situations and excuses regarding instances of non-payment. For instance, P9 highlighted common excuses such as clients claiming to have no cash on hand or facing issues with their payment cards, along with technological excuses like the absence of internet connection on their phones preventing payment:

*‘The reasons can be varied, but most excuses I’ve ever heard are like this: “I have no cash, and my card is not working, we will transfer the money into your account.” Or saying this: “I only pay using my iPhone, but I have no internet connection.” The strangest apology I ever heard was said by one of the female passengers, telling me this: “you are a woman and so are we, you should not take money from us.” I*

*personally think the payment options on the app allowed clients to be manipulative when paying. ' (P9)*

Lastly, participants outlined two interesting aspects of their clients' trust in them: acceptance from men and disapproval from women. These gender-related trust dynamics were discussed by P1, who shared her perception of receiving more trust and support from men, especially in the initial stages. She thus highlighted differences in trust levels based on the gender of the clients:

*'Without exaggeration, the trust that I found in men's support for me was greater than that of women, especially in the beginning. Adult women are afraid and doubt my ability to drive a car, while fathers do not want anyone to take care of their children except me, fathers trust me very much about picking up their children from school; on the other hand, women are afraid to the point that I hear their prayers for not having a car accident. This is absolutely normal as it was no cultural readiness to change. ' (P1)*

Despite the conservativeness and cultural setting of SA, the quote above brings up an interesting point, which is that fathers trust Saudi female drivers for child transportation services. Another point to mention about gender stereotypes is that P1 acknowledged cultural readiness as a factor influencing trust dynamics while recognising that gender stereotypes may play a role in shaping perceptions and trust levels. According to P15, not all female passengers were scared to ride with a female driver. Some female passengers exhibited remarkable trust and had positive interactions with the drivers, treating them with familial regard:

*'The trust from the female passengers in us is remarkable, they bring out the best of us, in general, they treat us like family members. For example, they try to calm me*



*down when I drive under pressure due to heavy traffic, they say nice things to me and ask me to teach them how to drive, this is amazing, to be honest. (P15)*

#### **5.4.4 Dealing with Male Passengers**

This section focuses on the particular factors associated with engaging with male passengers, taking into account possible safety issues regarding men who impersonate women and highlighting the need to maintain a gender-neutral and professional demeanour. Participant P3, who picked up only female passengers, said that only Wsslini provides this functionality. She contemplated a profession that entails working exclusively with women and did not anticipate having to interact with men as well:

*'I also hate the fact that when men make a request for a ride on women's apps, this is unfair, and something [that] should not be happening. That's why I always make sure those who made the request are basically women. On the Wsslini app, there are no guarantees about the gender of the passenger. It is not a big deal, men either came up with female names or their real names asking us to pick up their daughters, sisters or wives. In this case, I am ok, but I must make sure this is true.'* (P3)

This may indicate that the only reason some female drivers choose such jobs is because they believe that all of their clients will be female. This perspective is also endorsed by another participant (P5), whose primary objective is to collaborate with women, although she is aware of the possibility of encountering harassment from men on the app:

*'Working in this particular role has never presented me with any kind of challenge, but I've heard a lot of horror tales from other women who work as drivers. Personally, I was in a situation where some women made the ride request through their husbands' phones, and all was well. However, I am not going to be surprised*

*if I see unusual requests made by those scammers or men want to harass me or waste my time, thus, I am fully aware that the main goal is only to pick up ladies, that's it.'*

(P5)

Another interesting point was brought up by P20, who explained her unwillingness to accept ride requests from men and the limits she set for her personal safety. She linked the decision to avoid male clients to a perception of higher risk and potential danger associated with dealing with men in this job:

*'There are many reasons why men make requests on women's apps; they do not know that the app is only for women, the journey is for their families, or they did not find any ride on other apps. For me, I cannot accept any request made by a man even if the journey was for his family. It is a limit I don't want to cross as it is very dangerous to deal with men, especially in such jobs where the risk is higher.'* (P20)

#### **5.4.5 Safety Concern**

This section explores the safety issues that are taken into account by both drivers and passengers. First, the installation of a dashcam was discussed as a measure for enhancing security and safety. Both drivers and passengers feel more secure when the vehicle is equipped with a dashcam recording the surroundings. Participants P7 and P13 stated that the benefits of a dashcam include professional image and customer trust:

*'Having the dashcam is not only for my safety and protection but also for the passengers' security. From my own experience, I and the passengers have the confidence to go anywhere when we know that our dashcam is on.'* (P7)

*'I never used the dashcam at the police station for passengers or anything like that, but I feel safe with it. I used it before for a car accident though. I also noticed how my clients appreciate [me] more for having the dashcam.'* (P13)

These two quotations indicate that passengers value the use of a dashcam for their personal safety and reflect the mutual trust and assurance that is communicated between the driver and passengers when the dashcam is in operation.

Joining dedicated WhatsApp and Telegram groups is another factor that was highlighted by P14. She shared and received advice within groups regarding ride-hailing services, providing and obtaining information related to the apps, and acknowledged the practice of sharing contact numbers and making deals outside of the apps:

*'Most of us, if not all of us, are either in Telegram groups or WhatsApp groups and this includes passengers and drivers. There are female groups and mixed-gender groups with a very large number of people. We interact about anything related to ride-hailing services and companies. We also help each other out by giving advice, information and contact numbers to make deals outside the apps' regulations. I think it is very important to join, and I have some amazing clients I gained from these groups.'* (P14)

This shows that for some clients and drivers, networking and relationship building facilitate deals outside the official apps and highlights the positive outcome of gaining valuable clients through these online communities.

The last factor in this sub-theme is psychological and personal preferences. There is a close connection between feeling safe and rides respecting the previously set conditions, such as

specific times, places and clients. Another participant reported feelings of safety, confidence or insecurity in different work environments and with various passenger demographics:

*‘There is nothing to be worried about. However, I feel safer when I work in the evening because the traffic is busy, and people are everywhere. I also feel more confident and safer when I work in the area where I live, so, the farther away I drive, the more scared I get. Lastly, I would say that picking up older women gives me confidence in a way that I feel that their hope is in me, unlike mothers and children, they put some pressure on me, and I feel nervous and insecure sometimes.’ (P15)*

#### **5.4.6 Summary**

The theme of Saudi female drivers’ interactions with passengers encompasses various sub-themes, including encouragement and support, regret and aggressiveness, trust issues, dealing with male passengers and safety concerns. Participants shared experiences of forming meaningful connections with supportive passengers, which boosted their job satisfaction and sense of empowerment. However, encounters with disrespectful or impolite passengers led to feelings of regret and aggression for some drivers. Trust issues emerged regarding security and payment reliability, with some drivers expressing a preference for working only with female passengers due to safety concerns. Safety measures like the use of dashcams and networking via messaging apps were highlighted as means to enhance security and build trust. Overall, the section provided a nuanced understanding of the complexities of driver–passenger interactions, shedding light on both positive and negative experiences. This comprehensive exploration offered valuable insights into the unique dynamics of this evolving social context.

### **5.5 Socio-Cultural and Religious Influences**

As discussed in the literature review, Saudi female drivers must consider various social, cultural, and religious factors in their daily lives. This section investigates the religious beliefs

and social practices influencing women's decisions to become ride-hailing drivers and their experiences with this occupation. By examining cultural norms from religious perspectives, the aim is to understand how these norms shape the acceptance and perception of women working as ride-hailing drivers. There is a clear correlation between socio-cultural and religious considerations and the decision-making process of Saudi women in selecting their occupations and pursuing their professional paths. For instance, women who opt to work as drivers require their families' permission and must navigate considerations such as sex segregation and social expectations.

### **5.5.1 Social Upbringing**

This sub-theme examines the role of family and upbringing in shaping the attitudes and choices of women regarding their careers, especially in non-traditional roles such as driving for ride-hailing services. Furthermore, it seeks to determine whether educational backgrounds and opportunities impact women's decision to enter the ride-hailing profession. Being raised in a family environment was cited as one of the most common reasons given by women in SA for deciding to work as drivers. When questioned about the impact of their upbringing on their viewpoint as female drivers, most participants provided a clear and unequivocal response, such as:

*'My upbringing just improved my viewpoint. I do not feel ashamed, why should I?*

*This job is basically organised and supported by the government.'* (P11)

*'Because my mom was a teacher, mother and father at the same time, I was raised by her for independence. Thus, I don't consider the basic idea of women working is unusual or a crime.'* (P9)

*'The death of my dad when I was in high school has shaped us to be more open-minded regarding jobs and getting incomes. Therefore, working as a driver was a piece of cake from the first time they announced it.'* (P18)

These quotes illustrate not only positive viewpoints on the job, the acceptance of women in the workforce and open-mindedness due to personal experiences but also the influence of upbringing, with P9 being raised by a mother who worked as a teacher and asserting her independence as a result. However, this was not the case for some other participants, who found the experience easier thanks to the supportive and facilitating nature of government laws and regulations. P5 and P21 reported a level of independence from traditional influences in favour of more contemporary factors:

*'The main reason for me is not the social upbringing, because it was and still is difficult for me to break the norms, so I think the support from my husband with the security and safety provided by the government is the main reason why I am working as a driver nowadays.'* (P5)

*'Although society has changed, what makes things much easier for me is the ease of our government. It is not my family, cultural and social upbringing, but it is strict laws and other women who encourage each other to meet their needs.'* (P21)

### **5.5.2 Social Media**

This section examines the role of social media platforms in facilitating the recruitment, support and communication of female ride-hailing drivers. It also explores the presence and dynamics of online communities or groups dedicated to female drivers on social media. Participants had different answers when asked about how social media affected their perspective on working as a driver, with some supporting and others opposing the role of social media. For example, P1,

P18 and P7 emphasised the importance of personal connections and support from individuals and identified the primary source of support as coming from people rather than social media platforms:

*'I have many Telegram and WhatsApp groups, but regarding social media, honestly, I did not see any effect, I did not notice a strong effect, but it is possible that if something becomes a problem, people will notice it faster and get involved easily through social media.'* (P1)

*'It was the support of people, not the role of social media. I saw nothing from Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, however, I found myself when joining the telegram groups. These groups have everything the passengers or the drivers need: guidance, news, support and information.'* (P18)

*'It did not affect me at all. I tried everything by myself, I tested everything. I learnt from my own mistakes.'* (P7)

However, P2 and P15 acknowledged the positive impact of platforms like TikTok, Twitter and other social media while expressing personal excitement and enthusiasm:

*'It was honestly positive because we can see what is going on TikTok or other social media. All that we see is huge support from the people around us. The whole world is getting excited. There are also some positive responses on the same apps that we are registered with, they have accounts, look at people's comments, they were very positive, it excites me.'* (P2)

*'Yes, watching the advertisement videos on YouTube and reading people's comments on Twitter and other groups such as Telegram made me happy and excited about working as a driver. I would say the impact of the social media was positive.'* (P15)

Another interesting point was mentioned by P22 and P11, who recognised social media as a key platform for discovering job opportunities:

*'I became aware of this employment opportunity via social media, and I would describe the effect as favourable. Has it influenced my viewpoint? It has improved it significantly.'* (P22)

*'I serve not only myself, I also serve my brothers and the family who need anything. Because of social media, I joined these apps and expanded my network to other communication channels like Telegram and WhatsApp.'* (P11)

### **5.5.3 Female Driver Groups**

Saudi women drivers' dependence on Telegram and WhatsApp groups was observed directly by talking to them. These participants reported joining these groups for several reasons, such as security, social and professional considerations. Regarding security, P6 had an enhanced sense of safety as a result of the collaborative efforts of the Telegram and WhatsApp group members, recognising that their combined contributions help address the deficiencies of ride-hailing applications in terms of safety precautions:

*'One of the good things about joining Telegram and WhatsApp groups is that we share information and inform each other about the scammers and impostors on female apps. We are safer since the great people in these amazing groups cover the shortcomings that the apps cannot cover.'* (P6)



The quotation above not only demonstrates the community's function as a watchdog but also highlights their attentiveness in combating fraud and averting security breaches. The members act as a collective watchdog against scams on women-centric apps and contribute to preventing security issues by sharing information and experiences. P16 illustrated how networking in the groups enhances relationships among female drivers, creating a collaborative support system through group connections:

*'I am a member of both Telegram and WhatsApp groups where we mutually benefit from each other's presence by exchanging valuable tips. Additionally, there are some groups that consist of both male and female individuals who serve as drivers and passengers. The networking within these groups facilitated the maintenance of my friendships with all the female drivers by regular communication with contacts, exchanging reports on journeys and providing support and assistance as required.'*

(P16)

Participant P8 was among many who effectively used the advantages of joining these large groups for professional gain. In establishing personal brand and business, P8 gained the trust of passengers to the extent that most prefer to request her services directly, without using the apps, as she observed:

*'We have large WhatsApp and Telegram groups on which we share our services with each other. Some passengers, in fact, most of them, want our services without using the app once they trust us. I created my personal brand and my own business in the way I please. I established standards that serve both me and the passengers, such as working at certain hours and going to specific places.'* (P8)

#### 5.5.4 Gender Suitability

The sub-theme of gender suitability covers the impact of gender perceptions on the representation of women in ride-hailing services, specifically focusing on how societal views about women's aptitude for driving affect their participation in the business. It also includes initiatives aimed at challenging and dismantling gender preconceptions in the ride-hailing sector, starting from the group of participants that deem it suitable for women to work or do not have a problem with women working as drivers. Within this group, P1, from a local cultural perspective, rejected the notion that men are inherently better at driving long hours or handling difficult situations, noting that female passengers generally prefer female drivers.

*'On the contrary, I had the impression that it leaned more towards the feminine side. If you look closely, female passengers will always prefer female drivers, and that's why people's claims about men's strengths for driving long hours or bearing harder situations are useless. Because of our cultural settings, women at the end of the day need to be with women.'* (P1)

In line with the previous quote, participant P4 described the local society as conservative and religious, asserting that the job fits well in a conservative and religious community. She also observed that female passengers often prefer female drivers and linked female passenger preferences to cultural and societal norms:

*'I don't think so [working as a female driver], it's suitable for both sexes. We do not live in the past anymore, things have changed. It suits all people as a job. However, in our society, it fits much better than any other liberal country because we are still conservative and religious people. From what I see from my own experience, female passengers will choose no one but female drivers.'* (P4)

Conversely, another group of participants believed that working as a driver is purely for men. For example, P5 expressed a belief that women's bodies are naturally inclined towards activities other than driving. She said:

*'Indeed, the woman's body is naturally inclined towards engaging in activities that are more pleasant than driving. Truly, a man has more stamina than a woman, which is a characteristic inherent in the physical nature. I really dislike extended periods of time spent driving,' (P5)*

Participant P6 partially agreed with this point but raised another aspect. She acknowledged that certain tasks may be better suited for men based on physical abilities but felt that driving fits women perfectly, highlighting the significance of privacy and adherence to societal norms for women:

*'Men physically are much better at it if someone wants to work on it for a long period of time. However, for us as women, it fits us perfectly, more than anyone else, because we have our own privacy and norms. To be honest, I do not need to know everything, in fact, I do not have to know anything, there are some services where people take care of everything in the car if the car breaks down or anything.'* (P6)

Participant P6 used the argument of men's ability for car repair in a logical way, while P9 stated that there is no need for female drivers to personally engage in car repair activities as they can rely on professional car services to handle these. Some participants highlighted the availability of car repair services, stressing the convenience of simply making a call when needed:

*'When it comes to automobile repair, I am not required to take any action since there are several car services available to do the task on my behalf. All I need to do is just contact them if there is an issue.'* (P9)

Participants were also asked about the basis and reasons for their working as a driver aside from financial independence. The results of the study show that some participants already worked in other sectors and needed another part-time job. This was the case of participant P2:

*'I have attempted several supplementary institutions and occupations, but, regrettably, no response has been received so far. My only recourse to get part-time work was to become a driver.'* (P2)

For some non-employee participants, working in ride-hailing services was the only available option when looking for a job. Participant P1 pointed out challenges in securing employment through previous job applications, stating that given her present situation, she had no choice but to look for a job as a driver:

*'I have applied to many jobs; I was unable to get employment that aligned with my preferences. I am now unable to get employment that aligns with my own criteria. Consequently, my current circumstances leave me with little alternative but to pursue employment as a driver in ride-hailing services.'* (P1)

Lastly, several participants, such as P4 and P6, did not have much to do in their lives aside from taking care of their house and children. Therefore, they worked as female drivers to fill their spare time because they did not want to look for traditional jobs or work in any particular sector.

*'Given the abundance of my spare time, I am motivated to use it in a manner that yields personal benefits. Working as a female driver is a way to have fun on my own terms when I finish my housework.'* (P4)

*'Since it's enjoyable to work, I run the app when I can. I won't have an actual job, so driving is enjoyable and something I can use whenever I want because I have a lot of free time after I finish taking care of my kids.'* (P6)

### **5.5.5 The Social Role of Women**

This section investigates how societal expectations of traditional gender roles influence women's decision to pursue a career in ride-hailing and whether there is a shift in societal perceptions of the roles and capabilities of women in the workforce, especially in non-traditional occupations. Prioritising family, working as a driver in addition to family tasks and financial contributions are the three factors that will be the focus of this section.

Regarding the first factor, prioritising family, P3 explained that family and household duties are fundamental and foundational, emphasising women's primary responsibility for taking care of children and husbands. She also stated that family duties take precedence over other responsibilities, highlighting the importance of attending to family needs before engaging in other work:

*'Carrying out family and household duties is the basis of everything and above all else. It's my primary role to take care of the children and my husband before starting any other work.'* (P3)

When asked about the second factor that influenced her, P3 replied:

*'My calendar is busy, which is great, and I feel both busier and more organised. Luckily, not all of my children attend school. After I make breakfast, I drop off my kids at school and the other one, she go to her grandparents. After that, I put in 1 hour, 2 hours or even 3.5 hours of work; picking up and dropping off my clients. After that, I return to my children and go home...' (P3)*

P3 was not the only participant who viewed being busy positively or felt more organised due to her busy schedule. Similarly, participant P9 expressed a heightened sense of organisation, describing a more disciplined and strict approach to managing time. In an effort to prevent her family from finding reasons not to allow her to work, P9 also established personal standards, or 'red lines', that she would not compromise:

*'Time management is something I'm much more disciplined about now, which is good. I am organising everything in a sequential fashion and telling myself that these tasks must be done correctly regardless of the consequences or the temptation, such as having a high income, and I tell myself these things have to be done properly no matter what. I do this so I leave no excuses for my family, it is like I am putting red lines for myself not to cross. I am not giving anyone the chance to criticise me.'* (P9)

The interplay between female drivers' professional roles and household responsibilities presents a complex and noteworthy dynamic. In navigating these dual obligations, some female drivers adopt a proactive approach by setting clear boundaries to minimise conflicts with family members and prioritise household duties. This strategic stance not only serves to mitigate potential arguments but also underscores their commitment to managing household affairs efficiently. Additionally, ensuring harmonious scheduling between work and family commitments emerges as a significant consideration for female drivers like Participant P8, who

prioritise family cohesion and strive to maintain a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives:

*'I go to work as a driver only when my husband goes to work, I am home whenever he is home...'* (P8)

This quote shows that some participants adjusted their work schedules based on their husbands' work hours and demonstrated a commitment to prioritising family time.

The last factor focuses on financial contributions within the family. The majority of female drivers did not see themselves as obligated to contribute financially to the family. For example, P1 and P3 stated that financial contribution is not a requirement. However, both described occasional acts of kindness, such as buying things for home or their children:

*'I do contribute financially but at my own pace, I am not required to do so. But you know, sometimes, I must be kind or nice, so I buy some stuff for home. Otherwise, my family does not need me financially.'* (P1)

*'My family isn't dependent on me financially in any manner, therefore, I'm free to decide whether or not to pay. The majority of my earnings go towards my own needs. On occasion, I take care of my children's needs. Aside from that, my husband is the one who controls everything.'* (P3)

#### **5.5.6 Family Role and Influence**

The effects of family approval or disapproval on women's choices to work as ride-hailing drivers are examined in this section, which focuses on the effects of employment on family relations, especially conventional family roles. There was a strong relationship between female drivers and their families. For example, the families of the participants were involved in their

decision to work as drivers. Participant P13 indicated that her decision to pursue a career as a driver was not made unilaterally but involved family members in the decision-making process:

*'The choice to pursue a career as a driver was not decided unilaterally; I had to persuade my family, who had reservations due to concerns about safety and the perceived inadequate financial return.'* (P13)

Participant P17 also emphasised the importance and necessity of her husband's satisfaction as she noticed that her husband did not initially like the idea of his wife working as a driver. Thus, she described the struggles and potential divorce brought about by her career choice, reflecting on the challenges of balancing a career as a driver with marital expectations:

*'My husband did not like the idea even after I convinced him. My husband still hates the fact that I am driving during rush hours, in heavy traffic, taking unknown people with me and going to different locations. He is super worried about me and my safety and that causes a lot of troubles between us, we were seriously about to get a divorce because of my working as a driver.'* (P17)

The family's role also goes beyond involvement in decision-making as family members can take care of children while their mothers go to work. Participants P3 and P5 considered themselves fortunate to have their mother's and sister's support, respectively, expressing gratitude for their families' role in caring for their children:

*'My mother takes responsibility for my children while I attend to the task of picking up clients. I consider myself fortunate to have her since I am unable to place my confidence in anybody other than my mother to care for my children.'* (P3)



*'My sister takes care of my child when I go to work. When I leave for work, I am relieved of any concerns about my child's well-being since my sister plays the role of mother and takes care of them.'* (P5)

Finally, some of the drivers' families expressed constant concern about their reputation and social stereotypes. Participant P6 reflected on the potential impact of assuming multiple responsibilities on her self-perception and professional identity, specifically examining the issue of being both a nurse and a driver. She voiced her hesitations about simultaneously working as a driver and becoming a nurse due to her apprehension about her family's potential reaction:

*'I had a first feeling which is that I am not sure because I am already a nurse, so a first feeling came to me: How can I be a nurse and work as a driver and so on, and what should I tell my daughters? I was super shy. Should I tell them that I work as a driver? But then, between myself and my thoughts, I said that the most important thing in driving is that it is an honourable job, a job that brings me a livelihood... Like anything else, I currently have no issue accepting the title [driver] although I did not tell all my family members.'* (P6)

When asked why she did not tell all her family members, P6 responded:

*'I am not willing to explain or convince everyone, my husband's opinion is what really matters.'* (P6)

Another participant added:

*'I am sure they will say something like "are you crazy? You work as a driver when you are a teacher?" or "be a teacher, never quit" or "this job [driving] is risky" or "do you need money? We [will] give you money, just do not work as a driver".'* (P7)

These quotes highlight the pressure faced by female drivers to adhere to traditional gender roles, often anticipating negative reactions or criticism from others, particularly regarding the balancing of multiple roles. Additionally, many married participants felt compelled to prioritise their husbands' opinions when making decisions. Participant P4, for instance, regarded her husband's satisfaction as paramount in her decision-making process and agreed to his conditions for her to pursue a career as a driver, illustrating the influence of marital dynamics on women's choices:

*'My husband's satisfaction regarding my decision is all I care about. He agreed [for me] to become a driver but under some conditions, and I think these conditions are logical and reasonable. For example, I should not drive late, spend too much time outside, drive long journeys and, finally, I should check if all my passengers are female and good passengers.'* (P4)

### **5.5.7 Cultural Readiness**

With the overarching sub-theme of cultural readiness, the focus is on how open and welcoming cultures are to women working in service industries such as ride-hailing, as well as any cultural obstacles or difficulties that female drivers may encounter in various settings. Participant P1 highlighted the slow cultural acceptance of women's readiness to drive, although driving itself is not religiously forbidden. However, she acknowledged that not everyone may hold the same beliefs or perspectives:

*'Driving itself is not religiously forbidden, but our cultural readiness for it is very slow. Not only that, this also has affected us regarding what to wear, when to drive and where to drive. In the end, people are different, the issue is a matter of convictions, so not all people are committed to what I say.'* (P1)

For her part, P3, when asked whether she would be willing to pick up both male and female passengers, expressed her desire not to bring shame to the family, emphasising the importance of following religious and cultural norms:

*'We are still a conservative society; it is not acceptable for us to break religious and cultural norms. If I violate any of these norms, people will speak badly of me. That's true, all I care about is my family, but the reputation of the family does not belong to me alone but also to all the family members; then why should I bring shame to my family? I am not saying driving or working as a driver is a dishonourable job, but I do not see that our society is fully culturally ready at the moment.'* (P3)

Although it is important to note that driving or working as a driver is not seen as dishonourable, according to some participants, some participants feel that Saudi society may not be culturally prepared to accept this. P11 highlighted the significance of working as a female driver, but asserted that society needs more time to adapt to the concept:

*'My husband maintains that working as a female driver is a very significant and important job due to sex segregation and societal standards. Nevertheless, he believes that society needs more time not only to embrace this concept but also to develop improved awareness and well-designed traffic infrastructure.'* (P11)

### 5.5.8 Impact on Career Choices

As previously said, women in SA have a diverse array of job prospects and options. Moreover, social life holds significant significance for numerous individuals in SA. The social environment can either expedite or impede the progress of women's empowerment for certain individuals, depending on the Kingdom's agenda. Participant P6 praised SA's Vision 2030 as a catalyst for women's emancipation, emphasising that it eliminated any justifications for not empowering women. Nevertheless, she conceded that there are still individuals who maintain viewpoints that restrict employment opportunities for women:

*'Right now, I do not think women have limited job options, but yeah, some people still have their own opinions and reasons, this is why they still refuse some jobs. But after all, the 2030 Vision has left women with no excuses not to be empowered.'* (P6)

I then asked whether participants felt that the scarcity of other job options impacted their choice to work as a driver. Participant P7 made it clear that she is not interested in these other job opportunities. This suggests that possibilities may exist, but they may not be a good fit for her:

*'That's true, there are job opportunities, many doors are open now. However, these chances are not for me. That's why I became a driver on these apps. I cannot work with men, and I won't accept any job that requires me to show my face.'* (P7)

This statement may convey a preference or worry for private or religious matters, specifically in the participant's reluctance to show her face. Participant P8 also expressed a personal stance against showing her face. This may be due to privacy concerns, cultural reasons or personal preferences that make her reluctant to share images of her face on platforms. In fact, all these reasons may be the main motivation for some participants' behaviour, as is the case for P3.

Participant P3 asserted her strong commitment to protecting her reputation and adhering to cultural norms, stating that she would not let the advantages of her work weaken her religious faith. This reflects a clear prioritisation of religious principles over the potential benefits of her job:

*'I am unable to be present in settings that are not segregated by gender or in occupations that require the removal of my facial covering. I abandoned using other ride-hailing service applications due to my dedication to concealing my face. I am not foolish enough to jeopardise my reputation and cultural values for the sake of monetary gain. Undoubtedly, I will not allow the benefits of this endeavour to undermine my religious conviction.'* (P3)

#### **5.5.9 Summary**

The study's results highlight the significant influence of participants' upbringing and family dynamics on their decision to work as drivers, with positive role models and familial support playing key roles. While some credited their families for encouraging them to be independent, others noted the enabling effect of government policies in facilitating women's entry into this field. Views of the impact of social media varied, with personal connections and platforms like Twitter and TikTok both playing significant roles in introducing participants to the profession and facilitating networking and mutual support. Participants expressed differing opinions on gender suitability for ride-hailing work, with some emphasising its compatibility with women's situations and others maintaining traditional views. Family and domestic responsibilities were seen as integral to participants' lives, as many balanced work and family duties while navigating societal expectations. Although families provided support, such as childcare, concerns about societal perceptions and cultural barriers persisted, reflecting the ongoing societal shift towards accepting women's presence in traditionally male-dominated roles.

## 5.6 Chapter Summary

The findings of this study provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the experiences of Saudi women working as drivers for ride-hailing services. By exploring themes such as drivers' usage of various apps, interactions with passengers and government support, a multifaceted narrative emerged, highlighting both the opportunities and the challenges faced by these women in their unique context. The study thus revealed that while female ride-hailing drivers in SA experience a sense of fulfilment and personal growth through their work, they also navigate complexities such as cultural norms, safety concerns and gender-specific challenges. The discussion chapters (Chapters 7 and 8) further elucidate these findings, contextualising them within the existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

Notably, the findings underscore the importance of understanding the interplay of cultural, economic and occupational factors in shaping the experiences of Saudi female drivers. From the influence of family dynamics and government policies to the nuances of driver–passenger interactions and the regulatory landscape, each aspect contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in this profession. Moving forward, the insights gleaned from this study can inform policies and interventions aimed at supporting and empowering Saudi women in the ride-hailing industry. By addressing gender-specific barriers, enhancing safety measures and providing tailored support, stakeholders can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for female drivers. In essence, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on gender, work and mobility in SA, offering valuable insights into the lived experiences of Saudi women working in the ride-hailing sector. By amplifying their voices and shedding light on their experiences, a step is taken towards fostering greater understanding and empowerment in this evolving social context.

## **Chapter 6: Findings Part II – Institutional-Level Analysis**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter delves into the fifth and final theme: government support, providing a comprehensive analysis of the governmental frameworks and support mechanisms that have been instrumental in shaping the participation of Saudi women in the ride-hailing sector. The analysis is based on evidence derived from interviews and documentary sources, systematically examined through the inductive thematic analysis process detailed in Chapter 4. The analysis highlights the pivotal roles of vital governmental bodies, such as the FWC and the TGA, in promoting gender equality and supporting women's economic empowerment. Additionally, insights from interviews with two prominent ride-hailing companies further illustrate how these entities align with SA's Vision 2030. Through the exploration of sub-themes—Directed Transportation Support Programme, Policy, Strategy, Financial Support, Empowerment Challenges, and the Lack of Specific Support for Women—this chapter critically examines the governmental initiatives and challenges that shape the landscape of female participation in the ride-hailing sector. These findings offer a macro-level perspective, laying the foundation for understanding driver-level experiences explored in Chapter 5.

### **6.2 Government Support**

The theme of Government Support focuses on the various governmental interventions that have played a crucial role in shaping the participation of Saudi women in the ride-hailing sector. This section examines the combination of targeted programmes, policies, and strategic initiatives the government has implemented to empower women, facilitating their entry into this emerging field while addressing the complexities of cultural norms and economic realities. Through a detailed analysis of official documents and interviews, this section uncovers how initiatives like the Freelance Support Programme have been specifically designed to meet the

unique needs of both full-time and aspiring ride-hailing drivers. These efforts, led by critical entities such as the MHRSD, the TGA, and the FWC, aim not only to promote workforce nationalisation but also to provide financial and strategic support to empower Saudi women within the industry. Despite these substantial efforts, challenges remain, particularly in addressing the specific needs of women within the sector. This analysis critically examines the successes and the limitations of current policies and strategies, highlighting existing gaps in support. By exploring the broader strategic and policy frameworks alongside the financial incentives offered by the government, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in promoting gender equality and economic empowerment for Saudi women in the ride-hailing industry.

### **6.2.1 The Freelancing Support Program**

This sub-theme examines the Freelance Support Programme (guided transport) outlined in the Frequently Asked Questions document on the Hadaf website. This programme, a key initiative by the Saudi government, is designed to support and empower Saudi citizens in the ride-hailing sector, particularly those unemployed, not pursuing full-time education, or retired. The document reveals several critical objectives and operational features of the programme, which align with broader national strategies such as workforce nationalisation. The Frequently Asked Questions document highlights the key stakeholders and their roles as the following:

**Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD):** This body likely oversees the program, ensuring it aligns with national employment policies and social development goals. Their involvement ensures the programme is integrated into broader efforts to improve employment conditions and social welfare.



**Transport General Authority (TGA):** This authority likely provides industry-specific regulations and ensures that the programme adheres to standards relevant to the transportation sector. They are essential for maintaining safety, efficiency, and compliance with transport regulations.

**Human Resources Development Fund (HadaF):** HadaF's involvement suggests that the programme includes financial support or incentives for participants, such as subsidies or grants. This financial backing is critical for encouraging participation among job seekers or individuals considering full-time freelancing in the transport sector.

**Future Work Company (FWC):** As a semi-government entity, this company's role likely involves the operational aspects of the programme, such as managing the technology platforms, providing training, or facilitating matchmaking between drivers and passengers. Their involvement highlights the importance of public-private partnerships in modern employment initiatives.

Regarding the target beneficiaries, this programme is strategically designed to address the needs of two key demographic groups, each facing distinct challenges within the evolving labour market. According to E1, an employee at the FWC, and documents found in the Frequently Asked Questions section on the HadaF website, these groups have been carefully identified based on the programme's overarching objectives and the current economic landscape. The first group includes the full-time workers. Including full-time workers as primary beneficiaries reflects a deliberate effort to stabilise and professionalise the gig economy, particularly within the transportation sector. As per the insights provided by E1, this initiative aims to support individuals engaged in full-time gig work by offering resources and mechanisms that enhance job security and income stability. The Frequently Asked Questions document further corroborates this by highlighting that the programme is designed to mitigate

the inherent precariousness associated with gig work, fostering a pathway towards more sustainable and secure employment. This approach addresses immediate economic vulnerabilities and contributes to the long-term goal of integrating gig workers into more formalised employment structures, thereby elevating the overall standards within the sector.

The second cohort comprises individuals actively seeking employment; for them, the programme serves as a pivotal entry point into the labour market, particularly within a sector experiencing significant expansion due to the rise of digital platforms in transportation. E1 underscores that by focusing on job seekers, the programme represents a proactive strategy to combat rising unemployment and underemployment. This perspective is reinforced by the Frequently Asked Questions document on the Hadaf website, which highlights the programme as a viable income-generating avenue, particularly in an economic climate where traditional employment opportunities may be scarce. The programme's focus on accessibility indicates an inclusive strategy, aiming to integrate a broader segment of the workforce into the rapidly growing digital economy. This approach not only addresses immediate economic challenges but also aligns with long-term employment trends. E1 further confirmed this by stating that:

*'...the objective is to establish ride-hailing as a sustainable occupation, encouraging individuals to commit to it as a long-term career rather than seeking alternative employment.'* (E1)

Several participants expressed concerns regarding the programme's eligibility criteria, particularly highlighting its exclusive focus on individuals fully engaged in ride-hailing services. Although keen to participate, these participants find themselves unable to access the programme's support due to their employment in sectors outside the ride-hailing industry. This restriction highlights the programme's narrowly defined target group. It suggests that, while it may effectively serve its intended beneficiaries, it inadvertently excludes individuals employed

in more traditional sectors or other forms of gig work. E3 and E4 stated that they have no direct involvement in decision-making with the Freelancing Support Program; they adhere to government criteria to obtain accreditation and licensing.

*‘I have no control over funding traditional employees who work part-time in ride-hailing services; this is not our responsibility.’ (E3)*

*‘We do not provide such a thing. Rules are the rules, whether on us or the drivers. We follow what the government says after we meet the criteria.’ (E4)*

Despite criticism from Saudi female drivers, it is noteworthy that significant efforts and substantial resources are being made to maximise the number of beneficiaries. These efforts extend beyond mere financial support, including the issuance of free work certificates, a prerequisite for financial assistance in ride-hailing services. According to the conditions for joining the programme, as outlined in the Guided Transport document available on the FWC's website, there are eight steps that individuals must follow to qualify for the Freelancing Support Programme offered by Hadaf. The following table summarises these steps:

**Table 14:** Application process for Freelancing Support on Hadaf's website

Action	Purpose
<b>Visit the National Labour Portal ‘Taqat’<sup>5</sup></b>	To access the National Labour Portal ‘Taqat’ online.
<b>Register</b>	To create an account. This typically involves providing personal information and creating login credentials.

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<sup>5</sup> Taqat refers to the National Labour Portal in Saudi Arabia, a government platform that provides employment services, job matching, and access to various employment support programmes, including the Freelance Support Programme (Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, n.d.).

<b>Log in</b>	Once registered, log in to the account on the National Labour Portal.
<b>Navigate to the Programme Section</b>	To find the portal's Freelance Support Programme (Ride-Hailing) area. This might fall under assistance programmes, initiatives, or freelancing.
<b>Apply for Support</b>	Application for support should be under the programme section. Start the application by clicking the link or button.
<b>Complete the Application Form</b>	To complete the application. Personal information, contact information and other eligibility-related factors may be included.
<b>Submit the Application</b>	To complete and submit the application form using the website and provide all needed papers and information.
<b>Monitor Application Status</b>	The platform may allow applicants to monitor their applications after submission. Updates on application evaluation or approval are possible.

Each of these stages is essential to the Freelancing Support Programme application process and following them will help applicants understand what they need to do. Drivers who choose to focus entirely on ride-hailing will have access to a generous subsidy for two years:

*‘The duration of the programme is 24 Gregorian months starting from the date of launching the programme, and the support provided in the programme stops at the end of the period.’ (Hadaf, Freelancing Support Programme Guidelines, n.d.)*

During this timeframe, qualified male and female drivers may get assistance as specified by the programme. Crucially, the assistance offered by the programme is intended to stop at the end of these 24 months. Participants should be aware of this time constraint and strategically prepare to maximise the assistance within the designated term of the programme. Drivers can also receive financial assistance via many processes to promote professional stability and productivity. The assistance encourages drivers to fulfil performance goals and benefit the ride-hailing industry. The support mechanism of the programme is as follows:

*‘One is the disbursement of a monthly subsidy amount to the worker in this activity (directed transport) at a rate of (40) % of his total monthly income and maximum support of (2,400) riyals per month, and it is required to obtain support commitment to achieve the number of trips (21) trips. Second, incentive support should be disbursed in the amount of (3,000) riyals for the freelancer benefiting from the support every six months. Moreover, this support aims at professional stability and increasing productivity when the worker achieves a total monthly income of not less than (5,000) riyals for six consecutive months while meeting the performance standards related to work during peak times so that the period of work – during peak times – is not less than (50%) of the total time.’* (HadaF, Freelancing Support Programme Guidelines, n.d.)

In conclusion, as outlined in the HadaF guidelines, the Freelancing Support Programme plays a pivotal role in the Saudi government's efforts to empower citizens within the ride-hailing sector. As detailed in the application process and support mechanisms, the programme's structured approach underscores its commitment to professionalising gig work and integrating it into the broader economic framework. Despite some criticism regarding its narrow eligibility criteria, the programme offers substantial financial incentives and clear pathways for participation, aiming to stabilise the income of drivers over two years. However, participants

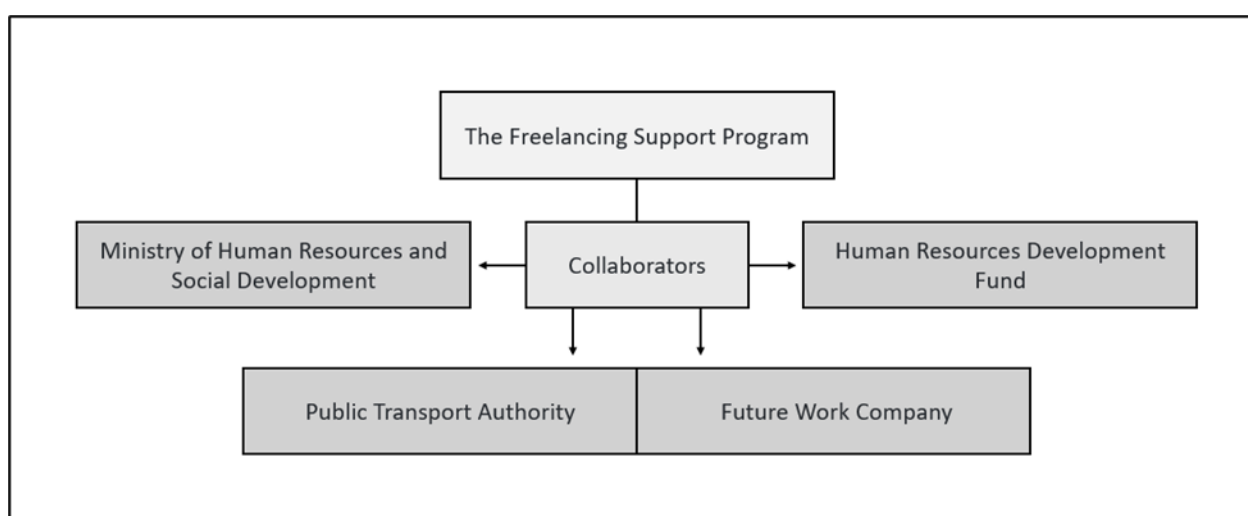
must strategically utilise this support within the designated timeframe, as the benefits are limited to the initial 24 months. This initiative reflects a broader trend towards formalising gig economy roles and aligns with national workforce nationalisation and economic diversification objectives.

### **6.2.2 Policy**

The sub-theme explores the policies governing the Freelancing Support Programme, highlighting the eligibility criteria, application process, and operational adjustments designed to empower Saudi citizens in the ride-hailing sector through structured support and regulatory oversight, as shown in Figure 12. To participate:

*‘Individuals must register with and obtain accreditation from one of the vehicle routing applications licensed by the Transport General Authority. They must obtain a freelance document through the freelance platform (freelance.sa) and apply for the support programme via the Taqat portal.’* (Hadaq, Frequently Asked Questions document, n.d.).

**Figure 12:** Collaboration framework for the freelancing support programme



According to the FWC's document on Conditions for Joining the Programme, applicants must meet specific eligibility criteria to participate, which are essential for securing government funding. These requirements are summarised below (see Table 15).

**Table 15:** Summary of programme eligibility requirements

<b>Saudi nationality</b>	<b>Age from 20 to 60 years</b>
<b>The applicant must not have another job'</b>	The applicant must not be a student, retired or employed
<b>The applicant must not be the owner of a commercial register</b>	The applicant must not be a current beneficiary of the fund's support programmes

<b>Registration with approved ride-hailing applications</b>	Issuance of a freelance certificate
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These criteria define the prerequisites that applicants must meet to be eligible for the self-employment programme and receive government assistance. The standards include several areas like age, work position, ownership and interaction with authorised ride-hailing applications, among others. Meeting these requirements is essential for those who are seeking government support for their self-employment endeavours. To create greater empowerment opportunities, E1 and E2 stated that there is no financial requirement for applying for government support as the policy welcomes all Saudis:

*‘There is no cost associated with obtaining the paperwork to receive support; in fact, it is provided without charge.’ (E2)*

In accordance with the policies related to enabling work in transportation, the incentives and advantages provided in the ride-hailing profession create a friendly environment for self-employed drivers. These include financial assistance, insurance choices and extra bonuses offered via partnerships and offers on the freelancing site. Some of the advantages and rewards offered to those in possession of a freelancer certificate include:

*‘1) The possibility of opening a bank account (commercial) dedicated to the freelance category. 2) Access to the self-employment financing product provided by the Social Development Bank (Nafath). 3) The possibility of benefiting from voluntary participation in social insurance. 4) The possibility of benefiting from the benefits, discounts and offers announced in the freelance portal.’ (Hadaf, Frequently Asked Questions document, n.d.)*



FWC, according to E1, also offers agreements and initiatives between ride-hailing apps and Hadaf regarding the policy. One of the initiatives mentioned to empower drivers is as follows:

*‘Drivers can have the support of the fund for two years, and this initiative only applies to Saudis...’ (E1)*

This demonstrates that the period of support and restrictions based on nationality are as, if not more, significant than financial assistance. To alleviate difficulties, the number of trips required has been reduced:

*‘To improve the programme, increase the number of beneficiaries and reduce the chances of unemployment, peak hours have been suspended, and the number of trips has been reduced from 42 to 21 trips’ (E1)*

These operational changes reflect the modifications made to the programme, particularly the suspension of peak hours and the reduction in the number of required trips, to ensure that a larger number of participants join the programme. In summary, this sub-theme reflects various policy dimensions in the ride-hailing industry, encompassing regulatory frameworks, safety considerations, financial support and operational adjustments. These policies collectively contribute to shaping a secure, supportive and efficient environment for both drivers and passengers in the ride-hailing sector.

### **6.2.3 Strategy**

A variety of strategies are used to cultivate a work environment that is both dynamic and flexible. These strategies prioritise innovation, flexibility, cooperation with regulators, compliance with legislation and the utilisation of technology to maximise possibilities in the gig economy for individuals of all genders. The following table shows the strategies that have been developed according to FWC.

**Table 16: FWC's vision and strategy for Saudi labour in the gig economy**

<b>Vision</b>	
<b>To boost economic value, equip the Saudi labour market to lead the worldwide shift towards a digitally connected, inventive and future workplace</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	
<b>To provide work possibilities for the youth by promoting a free labour market</b>	
<b>Mandate</b>	
<b>Create flexible work models</b>	To boost investment and employment
<b>Drive initiatives</b>	To expand an innovative market
<b>Use new technology</b>	To allow free labour
<b>Cooperate with regulators</b>	To safeguard society and workers' rights
<b>Guarantee adherence to regulations</b>	To enhance market expansion
<b>Gather data and knowledge</b>	To predict the kingdom's future job market

#### **6.2.4 Financial Support**

Financial support was another motivation for participants to apply while working with ride-hailing apps. Participants who meet the requirements of the FW and TGA and are accepted into the programme should receive financial support. According to E1:

*'Drivers who have enrolled in the fund get a monthly stipend of 2,400 riyals (£509) for a duration of 2 years, in addition to their regular daily earnings via the app.'*  
(E1)

However, other conditions apply besides requirements for entry into the programme. According to P1, drivers must be registered with an accredited app to receive the stipend. She explained that she tried to obtain financial support but did not succeed:

*‘Unfortunately, I submitted my documents, but it was rejected... One of the reasons for the rejection is that I have to be registered with either Uber or Careem. I am registered only on the Wsslini app because it is for women. In this case, the financial support from ride-hailing does not cover the app I am working with. They only support some apps on their list; not all apps in ride-hailing services are supported by the government.’ (P1)*

The rejection seems to be attributed to the requirement to be registered with either Uber or Careem, two popular ride-hailing platforms. The participant, however, was only registered with Wsslini, an app specifically for women. Regarding Uber’s preference feature, P1 stated that it does not always function:

*‘My female friends who work as drivers also used to work for Uber and found out that this feature is not 100% applicable, they encounter male passengers despite giving preference to female passengers.’ (P1)*

The participant mentioned that despite setting a preference for female passengers, it is not always effective. This may imply that the feature does not guarantee that the driver will only receive requests from female passengers, raising concerns about its reliability and effectiveness. Additionally, the participant shared anecdotes about female friends who, despite using this feature, encountered male passengers. Regarding the extent to which the preference feature works, E2 explained:

*'We agreed with Uber, for example, of course, that the preference should work at a minimum of 80%, so the algorithms were programmed like this...' (E2)*

### **6.2.5 Empowerment Challenges**

Some rules and regulations have been developed to empower both men and women. The legislative body responsible for accelerating and validating the work of ride-hailing apps is the TGA. On the topic of security and safety regarding working with these applications, E1 described:

*'The connection between TGA and ride-hailing apps is established via the use of work permits and the implementation of a security assessment for drivers, which serves to validate the legitimacy of these applications.'* (E1)

The mention of security assessments and work permits indicates a strong emphasis on ensuring the security and safety of both drivers and passengers. This aligns with broader efforts to enhance safety measures within the ride-hailing industry. E2 noted that there are certain methods through which drivers may apply safety measures to develop greater confidence and create a safer environment for themselves and others:

*'The level of safety in working as a female driver is always a source of concern throughout the world, not only in SA. Therefore, we see some female drivers taking personal measures such as installing a dashcam in the car.'* (E2)

This statement suggests that female driver safety is a widespread issue globally, going beyond the unique circumstances of SA. Consequently, female drivers are said to be using precautionary steps to address their apprehensions over personal safety. This proactive attitude demonstrates a strong feeling of empowerment and autonomy in dealing with safety concerns.

Additionally, E1 emphasised that cultural restrictions impact women more than men, particularly in terms of working late at night. This suggests a recognition of gender-specific challenges rooted in cultural norms:

*‘Women, unlike men, cannot work from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. with no issue, no, the cultural restrictions make it hard for them to do certain things. Therefore, I think culturally we need more time to adapt.’ (E1)*

It is important to note that cultural perspectives and societal expectations can vary widely, and discussions around cultural adaptation often involve complex and nuanced considerations. This statement reflects an awareness of the challenges women may face due to cultural norms and a suggestion for societal adjustments to better accommodate gender-related constraints. However, difficulties are not due solely to the culture but also to other reasons, as explained by E1:

*‘When we talk to Uber, there are other difficulties, such as the high cost of gasoline, high prices and weak empowerment due to the lack of sufficient support...’ (E1)*

The mention of the high cost of gasoline suggests that individuals working with apps, such as drivers, find the expenses associated with fuel to be a significant challenge. Fluctuating fuel prices can impact the overall profitability of their work, making it more challenging to sustain a viable income.

In addition, Participant P2 expressed dissatisfaction with the reduced frequency of ride requests. Waiting for about an hour without receiving any client requests suggests a decline in business for Wsslini drivers. This could be influenced by various factors, such as changes in demand, market saturation or other external factors impacting customer activity. P2 stated:

*'For us as drivers, it is not the same anymore, I sometimes open the app waiting for a request and it takes about 1 hour to find some clients. Why? It does not make any sense. It is not even worth it when we think about the price of gas.'* (P2)

Lastly, the reason behind some drivers' reluctance to work full time – the goal of the FW – is that the deduction rate from ride-hailing apps can be very high:

*'Certain drivers may see these attempts as futile given the commission fees of the applications, incurring traffic violations and other costs such as fuel and vehicle maintenance...'* (E1)

Overall, this statement reflects the complex interplay of economic, regulatory, cultural and operational challenges that drivers face. Addressing these concerns would likely require a comprehensive approach that considers commission structures, driver support programmes and collaboration between drivers, ride-sharing companies and relevant authorities to create a more sustainable and mutually beneficial environment.

#### **6.2.6 Lack of Specific Support for Women**

According to E1, initiatives have been devised to alleviate difficulties and prepare women for employment in the gig economy. Additionally, he mentioned intentions to enhance women's abilities to effectively address the challenges that arise when they are empowered:

*'We collaborate with the training centres to provide women with tailored courses that enhance their technical and soft skills. We have identified this as a significant obstacle since women currently lack these abilities.'* (E1)

The statement acknowledges that the lack of technical and soft skills is a significant obstacle for women in the context of employment in the gig economy. This acknowledgement is a

crucial step in addressing and overcoming these obstacles. E1's statement reflects a commitment to empowering women by taking proactive initiatives, collaborating with relevant entities and addressing specific obstacles, particularly the lack of technical and soft skills.

Further, some contributions addressed women-centric apps such as Nawaaem. E3 described the goal as to provide flexible job opportunities exclusively for women, aligning with the principles and values of Islamic Sharia. This approach is likely rooted in a desire to empower women economically while adhering to certain cultural or religious guidelines. She stated:

*'Nawaaem aims to provide flexible job opportunities to help women work in their area and raises the economic level in line with the principles and values of Islamic Sharia.'* (E3)

In addition, the female drivers reported relying on the ride-sharing apps as the primary and seemingly exclusive channel for communication with the apps. This suggests that, in their interactions or when they face issues, they do not have alternative means of communication or recourse outside of the app. P2 indicated that there is currently equal treatment between male and female drivers. However, she implied that this perceived equality may not be satisfactory or fair:

*'We communicate only with the app on any issue we face, we have no other references like talking to different authorities. Furthermore, we get equal treatment in comparison to males, which I think must change.'* (P2)

This statement suggests that female drivers cannot turn to other sources of authority to deal with their complaints or problems. In the absence of alternative methods, Saudi female drivers rely only on the application itself to find a solution. When E1, E2 and E4 were asked

whether any specific support or treatment is provided to Saudi women because of the cultural setting, they responded:

*'...today's initiatives do not differentiate between men and women, as everyone is equal...' (E1)*

*'The vision of the kingdom of Saudi Arabi is clear and aims to advance everyone, whether men or women...' (E2)*

*'There is no need for specific treatment, just the general system and regulations and everyone follows them' (E4)*

Three participants emphasised that the present programmes and the goal of SA prioritise equality, ensuring equal treatment for both men and women. This indicates a dedication to achieving gender equality within the specific programmes or support systems being considered, such as those related to ride-hailing services. Nonetheless, P19 argued that societal expectations and roles for men and women differ, particularly in terms of responsibilities such as cooking, housekeeping and childcare and that these differences should be acknowledged by workplace regulations:

*'I think there is no specific support for women, the support from the systems and regulations are for both –that is men and women – and this this wrong for various reasons. First, women are not like men and men are not like women, especially in our society; we have to take care of the cooking, house and children but men do not, or they do it differently. Second, we cannot work freely long hours, driving far away or late at night, but men have no issue with that. So, how do these regulations and rules treat us the same? We should be treated differently given our special*



*circumstances. I hate the fact that we work with all these restrictions because I cannot be at least creative in my work.’ (P19)*

This argument is based on the premise that equal treatment may not adequately address the unique difficulties encountered by women in their home and professional spheres. This implies that the restrictions imposed on women’s employment might impede their capacity to properly articulate themselves or achieve excellence in their positions. This viewpoint encompasses a more extensive discussion of gender roles, cultural norms and the equilibrium between equal treatment and recognising the distinct obstacles encountered by other genders. It underscores the need to take into account the variety of experiences and conditions when developing workplace legislation and practices.

#### **6.2.7 Summary**

This section on government support examined the regulatory landscape of ride-hailing services in SA and its impact on the empowerment of Saudi women. The partnership between the FWC and TGA illustrates how regulations shape the industry, particularly in relation to cultural norms and local legislation. The sub-section on policy explored the laws governing ride-hailing, including background checks and safety regulations. Furthermore, monetary incentives for drivers were analysed, with a focus on eligibility criteria and the challenges drivers face in accessing these funds.

The interviews conducted with representatives from two prominent ride-hailing firms provided valuable insights into the practical application of these regulations and incentives. These interviews highlighted how ride-hailing companies implement government policies, particularly in relation to driver recruitment, safety protocols, and the provision of incentives. This input was crucial in understanding the operational challenges and the effectiveness of government initiatives from the perspective of industry stakeholders. The analysis also

uncovered various obstacles, such as cultural constraints and fuel expenses, underscoring the need for a holistic approach to supporting drivers. Finally, the section addressed the lack of specific support for women, focusing on the gender-specific challenges associated with ride-hailing apps. The insights from the interviews further emphasised these challenges, revealing gaps in current practices that need to be addressed. Overall, this section underscored the government's role in shaping the industry and highlighted the necessity for tailored support to effectively address gender-specific barriers and enhance the participation of Saudi women in the gig economy.

### **6.3 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the analysis has centred on the crucial role of governmental support in shaping the participation of Saudi women in the ride-hailing sector, building on the individual-level insights discussed in the previous chapter. The examination has highlighted how government policies, strategies, and financial incentives have significantly influenced female participation, with a particular focus on the contributions of key governmental bodies such as the FWC and the TGA. The chapter began by exploring the Government Support theme, where targeted programmes like the Freelance Support Programme were dissected to understand their impact on empowering Saudi women within the gig economy. The analysis revealed both the successes and limitations of these initiatives, particularly in addressing the unique challenges faced by women in this sector. The chapter then delved into specific sub-themes, including Policy, Strategy, Financial Support, Empowerment Challenges, and the Lack of Specific Support for Women. Each of these sub-themes provided a detailed examination of the various dimensions of governmental support. For instance, the Policy sub-theme highlighted the regulatory frameworks and operational adjustments designed to empower citizens, while the Strategy sub-theme focused on the innovative approaches employed to foster a dynamic and inclusive work

environment. Financial Support was also a key focus, uncovering the motivations and challenges faced by participants in accessing government funds.

However, the analysis also pointed out several Empowerment Challenges, particularly those rooted in cultural norms and economic constraints, such as the high fuel cost and the limited availability of specific support for women. The chapter concluded by addressing the Lack of Specific Support for Women, a critical area where current governmental initiatives fall short, as highlighted by both interview data and policy analysis. Overall, this chapter underscores the pivotal role of government interventions in shaping the ride-hailing sector in SA, while also identifying significant gaps that need to be addressed to enhance gender equality and support the economic empowerment of women in the gig economy.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion of Female Drivers' Experiences**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This thesis seeks to unravel the intricacies of Saudi women's experiences in the gig economy, specifically in the realm of ride-hailing services. The data collection began with the initial approach, wherein Saudi female drivers were invited for interviews, offering valuable insights through their responses. This approach was broadened to include individuals employed by both government entities and local companies, enriching the study with a more holistic perspective on the phenomenon. Following this, the documentary analysis method was employed to scrutinise the strategies, policies and regulations pertaining to ride-hailing services, drawing on information documented on government websites.

The first phase of this research played a pivotal role in acquiring knowledge and fostering a profound understanding of how the experiences of Saudi female drivers can be delineated through an exploration of their motivations and obstacles. The results gleaned from this phase illuminated a correlation between the motivations that drive Saudi women to take on the role of drivers, their app preferences, and the transition from traditional employment to self-employment. It also underscored the complexity of their experiences, revealing that a singular, concise definition of their professional and personal journeys falls short of encapsulating the rich tapestry of their experiences. This complexity is marked by significant overlap and intricacy, making a noteworthy contribution to the scholarship by offering a comprehensive understanding that benefits researchers seeking deeper insight into the nuanced experiences of Saudi women in the gig work environment. These experiences unfolded with elaborate details, woven together by external and internal factors, set against the multifaceted backdrop of cultural, social, religious, and professional contexts.

The second phase of this study, as discussed in detail in Chapter 8, played a fundamental role in gauging the readiness of local conditions across practical, professional, and cultural dimensions, all within a broader organisational context. This context encompassed vital support from the government to establish an inviting and conducive work environment, with a specific focus on attracting ride-hailing companies and Saudi women. Consequently, the planning and analytical process demonstrated its significance from an alternative standpoint, contributing to a more profound understanding of the self-employment experiences of Saudi women. Moreover, this process provided tangible solutions, cultural portrayals, and social insights, offering guidance on how ride-hailing companies and services can seamlessly integrate into the unique experiences of Saudi women.

The present chapter directly addresses Research Questions 1 and 2 by incorporating key concepts from the initial theoretical approach and broader literature, fostering a more coherent understanding at the driver level. It will present an interpretation of the findings, underscoring their significance from social, cultural and professional perspectives. The existing literature on the factors influencing Saudi women's participation in ride-hailing services lacks depth and is characterised by a scarcity of models or theories specific to this context. Despite this gap, the shared characteristics observed in the experiences of Saudi female drivers allow for meaningful comparisons with Western studies, whether directly related to Saudi women or not. Furthermore, the application of the initial theoretical framework, BCT, will be instrumental in clarifying the components of the findings, paving the way for the next utilisation of IIT in the upcoming chapter. Moving forward, the next chapter will meticulously explore motivations, barriers and implications for policymakers and businesses, covering considerations at both the governmental and organisational levels.

## **7.2 Empowerment Through Gig Work**

This section presents a comprehensive analysis drawing comparisons with appropriate literature to delve into the push and pull factors motivating Saudi women to work as drivers for ride-hailing service apps. It will delineate how these factors shape the overall experiences of Saudi female drivers in various ways while also considering the emergence of additional elements in the participants' responses. Before delving into a detailed discussion of these motives, it is crucial to recognise the diverse array of factors that emerged from the interviews with Saudi female drivers. They identified various factors, each considering one or more as pivotal in influencing their decisions. This variation in reasons could be attributed to the notion put forth by Cropanzano et al. (2023) that gig workers may not exhibit the motives, values, and behaviours typically emphasised among traditional workers due to their distinct psychological contract with the platform.

### **7.2.1 Breaking Free from Social Roles**

The findings of this study support the existing literature, highlighting that the factors shaping gig work go beyond personal, financial, and environmental considerations (Anwar & Graham, 2020; Dokuka et al., 2022; Fauzi et al., 2022). Moreover, they also encompass social and cultural dimensions, as noted by Kasliwal (2020). Furthermore, the findings affirm prior research, reinforcing the notion that the digital landscape offers women new opportunities in entrepreneurship, seemingly free from traditional societal inequalities associated with gender, ethnicity, and class (Heizmann & Liu, 2022; Galperin, 2021). According to the present study, women view gig labour as a means to attain a degree of independence and self-reliance within a structured society and traditional gender roles. In this context, BCT provides a useful framework for understanding these findings, particularly in how Saudi women's participation in gig work, such as ride-hailing services, represents a deviation from traditionally constructed gender roles shaped by both biological predispositions and social expectations. The theory

posits that while certain biological factors may influence behaviour, it is the social environment that significantly moulds these roles, allowing for the possibility of change and adaptation, as evidenced by these women's pursuit of gig work as a path to independence.

The findings revealed that Saudi female participants viewed assuming the role of a driver as a turning point in their lives, expressing a strong yearning for heightened freedom and independence when contrasted with other occupational paths. Feeling constrained by societal roles and cultural restrictions, the participants were motivated to actively pursue self-worth and self-confidence. This determination pushed them to embrace the freelance work environment, marking the initial strides in a journey towards cultivating self-esteem and liberating themselves from entrenched stereotypes. This aligns with BCT's premise that gender roles, while influenced by biological factors, are heavily shaped by social constructs, and can be redefined through new social roles, such as those offered by the gig economy. This imperative for change stems from two primary reasons: social and psychological considerations.

First, from a social perspective, the Saudi women in this study highlighted the significant impact of cultural norms on societal expectations, which often relegate women to subordinate roles (Moubarak et al., 2022). Despite the aspirations and capabilities of many Saudi women to navigate shifts in economic, social, and cultural dynamics, obstacles rooted in these cultural and social influences frequently impede their efforts to overcome challenges within both the professional sphere and broader societal contexts (Hakem, 2017). In traditional workplaces, Saudi women face a myriad of challenges, including sex segregation, limited access to higher education, traditional attitudes towards women, male-dominated work environments, the necessity of family approval, low wages, and nepotism (Hakem, 2017; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Aldraehim et al., 2012; Al-Shehry et al., 2006). Consequently, gig work has emerged as a viable alternative for many women in this study, offering a means to bypass some of the cultural restrictions that have hindered their professional advancement. The participants expressed

optimism about self-employment, viewing it not as an end in itself, but as an initial step towards greater empowerment (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.6). They perceived gig work as a preliminary phase in their journey towards enhanced autonomy and fulfilment.

Second, from a psychological standpoint, the Saudi women in this study expressed a desire for roles that hold meaning beyond traditional or subordinate positions, as they firmly believed that they were not less competent than men. The participants' pursuit of self-worth and validation for their abilities through gig work serves as a hopeful prelude to more significant strides towards enhanced empowerment. BCT supports this psychological aspect by suggesting that self-perception and internalised social roles significantly influence individuals' motivations and behaviours. Some Saudi female drivers perceived gig work merely as a tool for asserting their presence. This was driven by the necessity for psychological empowerment rather than an evaluation of the success or failure of gig work as a strategy for empowering women. The significance of psychological empowerment is underscored by Oladipo (2009), who found that the effectiveness of various economic and community empowerment initiatives has been limited. This highlights the difference between creating favourable conditions for empowerment and the actual achievement of empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995).

Oladipo defines psychological empowerment as a mental state characterised by the internalisation of goals, competence and a sense of control over one's actions. In a similar vein, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) portray psychological empowerment as a harmonious blend of four cognitive assessments: impact, meaningfulness, self-efficacy and self-determination. In the professional context, impact refers to how individuals perceive their ability to influence work processes or outcomes within their organisation (Spreitzer et al., 1997). Meaningfulness pertains to the extent to which individuals feel that their job objectives hold personal significance and value and align with their values and beliefs (Bin Bakr & Alfayez, 2022). Self-efficacy denotes individuals' confidence in their ability to perform a job and meet



organisational requirements (Bin Bakr & Alfayez, 2022). Lastly, self-determination relates to the degree of independence individuals feel in making decisions (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

These four interconnected components collaboratively contribute to enhancing individuals' productivity and support organisations in achieving favourable outcomes. As a result, for some Saudi women, empowerment goes beyond securing temporary or permanent employment; instead, it serves as a means to liberate themselves from a society enforcing cultural restrictions without acknowledging the need for change. From the perspective of BCT, this liberation can be seen as an adaptive response to the social environment, where women actively reconstruct their roles to align with their self-perceived competencies and social aspirations. In light of these considerations, it becomes evident that additional factors, such as patriarchy, play a significant role in the decision-making of Saudi women opting for careers as drivers, particularly in the context of the staunchly patriarchal and male-dominated nature of Saudi society (Almathami et al., 2022). Thus, this study provides insights into the factors that drive Saudi women to engage in the gig work environment, extending beyond the previously discussed pull factors like freedom, flexibility, and independence. Notably, age-related motivations and the enjoyment of driving (Fauzi et al., 2022) were not featured prominently in this study, indicating a relatively lower significance for Saudi female drivers in the decision to participate in ride-hailing services.

### **7.2.2 Self-Efficacy and Self Sufficiency**

Saudi women's perceptions of the personal freedom associated with working as drivers hold significant importance, as highlighted by numerous women in this study. The participants expressed a deliberate choice to pursue a career as drivers, citing the financial, temporal, spatial and professional autonomy that alternative occupations often lack. BCT offers a framework for understanding how these perceptions of autonomy are shaped not only by social constructs but

also by the interaction between these constructs and biological predispositions. According to BCT, while biological factors may play a role in shaping initial perceptions of self-efficacy, it is the social environment that allows these perceptions to evolve, particularly in contexts that challenge traditional gender roles, such as gig work.

The study's findings underscore the constrained employment options faced by Saudi women as a consequence of domestic responsibilities and religious considerations. Consequently, working as a driver emerges as a practical avenue for exploring additional sources of income or employment while aligning with prevailing family standards. These findings coincide with those of a previous study of the challenges encountered by women drivers in Indonesia, which explored social, cultural and structural factors (Zulfiyan, 2020). In this Saudi context, women drivers frequently grapple with challenges in balancing work and family duties as their husbands may impose restrictions on their work hours, deeming certain times unsafe and impeding their ability to pursue full-time employment. This situation reflects a gender-based division of labour, contributing to women's excessive workloads due to limitations on their daily movements (Hanson & Johnston, 1985; Kwan, 1999; Scheiner & Holz-Rau, 2017).

The present study reveals the importance of achieving a harmonious equilibrium between personal life and professional commitments, a pivotal aspect emphasised consistently by the participants irrespective of their marital status or parental responsibilities (see Chapter 5, Section 5.5.5). Despite counterarguments challenging notions of autonomy and self-sufficiency, individuals exhibit a proclivity for assessing their lives positively and proactively endeavour to mitigate adverse physical and environmental influences to cultivate positive emotions (Kim et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with BCT, which suggests that while biological predispositions may inform certain behavioural tendencies, the social environment plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive and enact their self-efficacy, particularly in roles that require balancing competing demands.

Such efforts may substantially augment perceptions of self-worth and overall life quality, as posited by established frameworks such as those of Ryff and Keyes (1995) and Wrosch and Scheier (2003). A prevailing sentiment among the women interviewed is that their current role as drivers does not align with their vocational ideals; however, it stands as the pragmatic choice in view of the prevailing circumstances of family role restrictions. BCT provides insight into this phenomenon by suggesting that self-efficacy beliefs—crucial facets of self-leadership—are not fixed but can be adapted in response to changing social roles and environments. This phenomenon may be elucidated through the lens of self-efficacy beliefs, a crucial facet of self-leadership that denotes an individual's confidence in their capacity to succeed in a given context. As explained by Bandura and Wessels (1994), these beliefs positively influence individuals' thoughts, emotions, motivation and actions.

### **7.2.3 Skill Development**

The findings of this study unveiled a gap between the anticipated outcomes and the actual lived experiences of the participants, indicating that working as a driver entails encountering unforeseen or unpredictable experiences. BCT offers a lens to understand this gap by suggesting that while biological predispositions and educational backgrounds shape initial expectations, it is the interaction with the social environment that leads to the development of unforeseen skills. This phenomenon could be attributed to the participants' educational backgrounds or the level of support they receive from their immediate social networks. The participants expressed contentment stemming from the cultivation of unforeseen skills, suggesting a potential influence of not only their educational context and the support received from their close social circles but also their desire to learn more skills.

The skills they acquired and honed to various degrees through the experience of working as a driver addressed professional needs in areas such as soft skills, communication and technical

expertise. BCT posits that these skills, though not initially anticipated, emerge through the interaction between the individual's biological predispositions and the demands of the social environment—in this case, the gig work environment. Consequently, the mastery of these skills translated into a performance that earned the trust of clients, particularly parents of female passengers. Contrary to prior research suggesting women's perceived weaknesses and lack of skill utilisation, particularly in leveraging education for career progression (Chesters, 2018; Churchill & Craig, 2019), this study highlights that the participants' underutilisation of their certificates in conventional jobs is attributed to religious and social standards, including sex segregation. The outcomes of this study also stand in contrast to the findings presented by Greenwood et al. (2022), who posited that women may do worse than men as drivers due to a lack of professional skills and conventional gender norms in the field.

In this study, Saudi female drivers also achieved coexistence with their clients by fostering a creative environment through the enhancement of personal branding and marketing skills. From the perspective of BCT, this creative adaptation can be seen as a dynamic response to social constraints, allowing women to leverage their social networks and digital platforms to overcome limitations imposed by traditional norms. They established special connections with their clients through channels such as social media, Telegram, and WhatsApp groups, as well as engaging in direct interactions with passengers. This approach intentionally diverged from the regulations imposed by ride-hailing apps, which they found restrictive and undesirable.

Certainly, this approach did not emerge spontaneously; instead, creativity and the honing of skills played a significant role in their endeavours in the ride-hailing sector. As highlighted by Duffy et al. (2017) and Scolere (2019), the process of constructing a digital persona requires thoughtful consideration of the platform's attributes, assumptions about the audience, and the worker's self-concept. BCT helps explain how these creative adaptations are influenced by both social context and individual agency, leading to the development of new skills that are

crucial for success in non-traditional work environments. Nevertheless, the Saudi female drivers in this study overcame cultural barriers and acted on their desire for work-life balance through creativity and skill development.

#### **7.2.4 Driving as ‘Not a Real Job’**

The participants’ perception of their jobs as either temporary or permanent hinged on various factors. Certain participants in this study saw working as a driver, not as a permanent or real profession, due to its lack of comparability with traditional occupations in terms of benefits and job security. BCT can help explain this perception by highlighting how societal norms and biological predispositions interact to shape the way individuals view certain types of work. Their expectations extended beyond contemplating departure; they also perceived a dearth of benefits and professional advancements, such as training courses and job promotions, in this occupation. In 2023, Myhill et al. reported similar results for this type of job, as most of their research participants indicated limited chances for professional progression, especially in terms of promotions and access to training and development opportunities.

Further, certain participants in this study felt compelled to opt for this line of work either as they awaited responses from other job applications or because they were unwilling to pursue mixed-gender job opportunities. In either scenario, driving constitutes a temporary occupation devoid of inherent stability, and the pervasive uncertainty associated with it often outweighs the financial benefits it offers. According to BCT, this view is shaped by the interaction between the participants' social environment and their biological inclinations, which prioritize stability and long-term security. Career-path uncertainty, which relates to predicting the kind of future job one will have, was identified by Caza et al. (2021) as one of several obstacles faced by gig workers.

Although the participants in the present study perceived working as a driver not to be an official job, they acknowledged this as a specific advantage of this type of employment. Many individuals asserted that conventional official jobs would not afford them the flexibility to come and go as they please, contingent on their family circumstances. This perspective aligns with BCT, which suggests that the perceived advantages of flexibility are a result of both individual needs and the social context that allows for such roles. This indicates that working as a driver is not a suitable occupation for everyone; rather, it is tailored for individuals with specific circumstances, encompassing social, cultural, religious, or professional considerations. However, from a BCT standpoint, this also raises a fundamental question about the fairness and sustainability of such work, particularly because these positive aspects may act as barriers for educated Saudi women, preventing them from accessing more stable and rewarding opportunities. Stewart and Stanford (2017) noted that the absence of long-term employment contracts and reliance on short-term gigs may result in job insecurity for workers who find themselves in constant need to seek new opportunities for sustainability.

### **7.3 Unravelling Socio-Cultural Beliefs**

The role of women in Saudi society, particularly their work as drivers, involves a multifaceted interplay of familial expectations, cultural norms, and societal pressures. BCT offers a valuable framework for understanding how these societal norms and expectations interact with innate biological tendencies to influence women's decisions and behaviours. This study delves into the intricate dynamics surrounding Saudi women's decisions to pursue careers as drivers, shedding light on the complex landscape they navigate. According to BCT, the social roles that Saudi women are expected to fulfil, especially in family and caregiving, are reinforced by both cultural traditions and biological predispositions, which together shape the options that women perceive as available or acceptable.

With a focus on family roles and influence, the research reveals that Saudi women drivers often prioritise work-life balance, particularly in balancing their maternal responsibilities with professional aspirations. BCT suggests that this prioritisation is not merely a cultural construct but also a reflection of deeper biological inclinations towards caregiving and familial cohesion, which are further amplified by societal expectations. The findings underscore the influence of familial support or opposition in shaping women's opportunities, with family members often exerting control over decisions regarding employment outside the home. This control can be seen as a manifestation of the biosocial construction, where social norms and biological imperatives converge to maintain traditional family structures and roles.

Moreover, societal perceptions and the preservation of family reputation emerged as central considerations for Saudi women drivers, influencing their actions and choices. BCT highlights how the need to preserve family reputation can be understood as a strategy to ensure social cohesion and stability, which are biologically advantageous for the family unit's survival and success in a traditional society. Despite these constraints and societal expectations, these women demonstrate agency in navigating their professional paths, emphasising the nuanced intersection of gender, culture, and familial dynamics in SA's evolving workforce. From a BCT perspective, this agency reflects the dynamic interplay between inherent biological drives for self-actualisation and the external social pressures that seek to channel these drives into socially acceptable forms. This study contributes valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Saudi women drivers, offering a deeper understanding and perception of the interplay between societal norms and individual agency in shaping professional trajectories.

### **7.3.1 Women's Role in the Family**

In this study, the family role of Saudi women is characterised by a combination of social norms, religious obligations and maternal expectations. Saudi women encounter these factors when

they aspire to pursue careers as drivers. In particular, childcare was regarded as a top priority by the female drivers in this study. The participants must ensure the well-being of their children while they work; if no older sibling, caregiver or grandparents are available to take care of the children, they may stop or refrain from working for the day. This family role elucidates why Saudi women prioritise work-life balance when applying for jobs, shedding light on why working as a driver has become particularly popular, especially among Saudi mothers. These results align with the findings of Walker and Webster (2007), who observed that mothers of younger children are more inclined to explore self-employment as a strategy for navigating the challenges of the domestic double shift. Moreover, Hilbrecht and Lero (2014) underscored the importance of temporal control and flexibility for achieving work-life balance, particularly for mothers. They showed that individuals' control over work hours is not solely determined by personal or professional factors but is also influenced by external elements like family needs and requirements.

Accordingly, numerous participants in the present study explained that their working as drivers on female-oriented apps was motivated not solely by gender segregation but also by the flexibility it provides, enabling them to prioritise household duties alongside other responsibilities. Despite acknowledging that freelance work lacks permanence, participants recognised and appreciated the convenience of easily joining or leaving, which enabled them to attend to family responsibilities as needed. They did not actively seek permanent positions because of work-life balance issues, viewing traditional jobs as more rigid and lacking the flexibility that aligns with their family role standards. The preference for flexibility and family-friendly environments, including cultural and religious influences, resonates with the findings of Fauzi et al. (2022). These authors noted that the dual responsibilities of work and family life can pose challenges in achieving balance, particularly in a religious society.



### **7.3.2 Reputation**

In this study, the term ‘reputation’ pertains to the sets of beliefs, opinions, and thoughts held by others that Saudi women drivers constantly consider. During the interviews, some participants articulated their ‘red lines’, namely, actions or behaviours that could transgress tribal customs and religious observances based on how others perceive them. Initially, these cultural norms—starting with tribal or familial customs—play a crucial role in shaping how Saudi women conduct themselves, and they are given serious consideration when the latter work as drivers. For example, Saudi female drivers are required to inform their families before driving anywhere, need their families’ permission to work as drivers, and, in some cases, are prohibited by their families from picking up male passengers. Indeed, they cannot drive without a sense of concern about the opinions of their family and others. People’s opinions hold significant weight for Saudi female drivers because they may not only impact them personally but also harm their family’s reputation, especially if they violate cultural norms. This damaging or negative perception arises when Saudi female drivers pick up unrelated men or drive late at night. Such actions were viewed unfavourably by the participants as it is customary for women to stay home or engage only with the men permitted by religious law.

As a result, to avoid tarnishing their reputation by engaging in unconventional practices while working as drivers, numerous Saudi female drivers resorted to picking up clients discreetly without informing their whole family or friends. Women drivers’ apprehension about others finding out about their activities was found in other studies, as evidenced by the research conducted by Beigi et al. (2020). These authors discussed a situation in which some women involved in specific types of work, such as driving, opted to keep this work secret from certain individuals in their lives due to prevailing negative attitudes towards female drivers. These women either chose to work in neighbourhoods where they were less likely to encounter passengers from their extended family or friends or actively avoided discussing their jobs with

them. The flexibility of their work hours played a crucial role in enabling them to attend afternoon parties or stop working when they felt that their job might be revealed to others. Essentially, Beigi et al. (2020) showed how these women managed their work arrangements to maintain secrecy or privacy regarding their professional activities from certain individuals in their personal lives.

While some research suggests that women may be perceived as unreliable drivers and untrustworthy behind the wheel (Yeung & von Hippel, 2008), it is important to consider alternative perspectives. Taxi driving is often associated with lower social classes (Anderson, 2013) and is predominantly a male profession (Roche et al., 2016). Nevertheless, participants in this study added different thoughts, refraining from informing their families and friends to evade feelings of regret, unwarranted advice and attempts at persuasion. For instance, certain Saudi families believe that working as a driver is suitable only for individuals with lower skill sets and does not align with the social and educational status of their members. Additionally, they perceive financial need as an insufficient justification for compromising the family's reputation. Consequently, they are willing to provide funds to their family members under the condition that they stop working as drivers and seek more prestigious employment.

However, the present study appears to be pioneering in its exploration of a unique phenomenon, where certain female drivers experience feelings of shame, uncertainty or stress because of society's opinions and reactions, despite their belief that they are not doing anything wrong by working as drivers. In the Saudi context, neglecting to care about one's reputation not only brings harm to the family but also impacts social standing. This suggests that Saudi female drivers may risk jeopardising their prospects for marriage because conservative men may be reluctant to consider a match with someone involved in such unconventional work. According to Alwedinani (2017), female nurses and physicians are facing difficulties because Saudi men are hesitant to marry women who work in integrated workplaces. According to Al-Rasheed

(2019), certain religious scholars and campaigners against women driving strategically utilised social media platforms to besmirch the reputation of female activists. These activists were unjustly characterised online as individuals of dubious morality and Western influences, ostensibly aiming to instigate turmoil within the community. Undoubtedly, the scope of the job extends much beyond being a driver as women's reputations and social standing are often the subjects of conversation, and the dangers of gossip are a continual source of concern (Al-Rasheed, 2019).

In conclusion, this pioneering section delved into the intricate dynamics of reputation, societal expectations and professional experiences among Saudi women drivers. The findings highlight the profound influence of societal opinions on their behaviour, with cultural norms and familial customs serving as significant determinants. The study reveals the lengths to which these women go to safeguard their reputations, often resorting to discreet practices to navigate societal judgements. The research challenges prevailing biases against female drivers and underscores the participants' conscious decisions to prioritise privacy over societal approval. The exploration of the shame, uncertainty and stress faced by these drivers adds a unique dimension to the existing literature, emphasising the societal consequences of unconventional work for women in the Saudi context. This research contributes valuable insights at the intersection of gender, reputation and societal expectations, offering a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Saudi women drivers. The implications of this work extend beyond individual experiences, impacting familial reputation, marriage prospects and broader societal perceptions, ultimately advancing the comprehension of the complex interplay between societal norms and the professional choices of Saudi women drivers.

### **7.3.3 The Role and Influence of the Family**

The participation of Saudi women in the workforce, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields like driving, has sparked considerable discussion and analysis. This study explores the complex factors affecting Saudi women's decision to become drivers, shedding light on how familial, cultural and societal norms influence their choices. By investigating the challenges and constraints that Saudi women encounter when pursuing driving careers, this research uncovers the dynamics that shape their professional paths and the extent to which family expectations impact their opportunities and experiences. The findings demonstrate that Saudi female drivers navigate a complex landscape of familial obligations and societal expectations and often seek input from spouses, siblings or parents before pursuing employment as drivers. While some women expressed satisfaction with established behavioural norms, familial expectations significantly limited their professional independence, influencing work schedules, acceptable locations and interactions with male passengers.

Importantly, the involvement of families introduces a nuanced perspective, with varying levels of support, opposition or neutrality towards women working as drivers. While some families may approve of the idea with certain conditions to ensure safety and adherence to cultural and religious norms, others strongly oppose it, citing cultural, religious and tribal rationales (see Chapter 5, Section 5.5.5). Previous research highlighting the crucial role of male guardianship in labour decisions emphasises the necessity of obtaining consent from husbands or fathers for women to pursue employment outside the home. However, amidst these constraints, a spectrum of responses emerges, ranging from active support to passive acceptance or reluctance. Notably, some families maintain a neutral stance, recognising women's right to work while navigating cultural and religious considerations. This nuanced landscape reflects the evolving dynamics of gender roles and employment opportunities in Saudi society, which are driven by transformative initiatives aligned with the kingdom's vision for progress and empowerment.

By exploring these dynamics, the present study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Saudi women drivers, emphasising the interplay between familial influences, cultural norms and individual agency shaping their professional journeys.

The conclusions drawn from this research demonstrate that Saudi female drivers encounter limitations in independently making decisions to work as drivers, regardless of their marital status. They are practically compelled to engage in discussions with their spouses, siblings or parents before taking any significant step, thus ensuring adherence to societal norms. As discussed in Section 5.5.6 of Chapter 5, Saudi families are actively involved in the decision-making process of women opting to work as drivers due to sentiments of love, care and a protective inclination. Controversially, the findings indicate that some Saudi women drivers express satisfaction with these prescribed behavioural norms, rationalising their acceptance based on the perceived benefits associated with such practices. However, the influence of their families imposes constraints on the freedom of Saudi women drivers in their profession, whether they realise it or not. They are obliged to adhere to specific schedules, refrain from driving to distant locations and abstain from visiting particular places, all under the belief that these measures ensure their safety. These limitations to the duration, location and timing of their work are highlighted by Micha et al. (2022), who suggested that women may face constraints or restrictions in their work based on their gender.

The impediment to women's work as drivers is not primarily rooted in family responsibilities or childcare but rather in the necessity to secure permission from those entrusted with authority over them, such as husbands or parents. As observed in this study, the involvement of family introduces an additional dimension that diverges from the outcomes of earlier research by Wang et al. (2020) and Lyu and Fan (2022). These studies posit that heightened responsibilities for women may increase the likelihood of interference between their non-work commitments, such as household and childcare responsibilities, and their professional duties. Nevertheless,

family intervention in the present study on female drivers typically manifests in three forms: acceptance, rejection or a neutral stance. In the first category, families endorsing the idea of women working as drivers do so with reservations. Although they believe in women's empowerment and intend to foster it, their support comes with conditions, emphasising the importance of considering cultural and religious standards. For instance, families often contact wives, sisters, or daughters who work as drivers picking up passengers, driven by a need for security and a dedication to safeguarding their well-being.

One pivotal factor influencing families to endorse women working as drivers is the intentional avoidance of interactions with male passengers. This decision reflects a strategic approach to minimising and navigating potential complexities associated with such engagements. The apprehension regarding negative potential complexities is grounded in concerns such as flirting, sexual harassment, fraud and blackmail. By ensuring safety while endorsing women as drivers, families seek to pre-emptively address and mitigate the risks associated with these undesirable situations. In this scenario, women drivers appreciate the support extended by their families and align with the notion that prioritising their safety is paramount. The practice of segregation between males and females in SA is in keeping with Arabic traditions that emphasise the preservation of the family's honour (Bajnaid & Elyas, 2017). Indeed, sex segregation in SA is not just a religious custom and practice but is firmly established in the tribal structure of Saudi society, as addressed by Alhazmi (2022) and Bajnaid and Elyas (2017).

In the second category, some Saudi families unequivocally oppose the idea of women engaging in driving occupations and do not accept it for their family members. They justify their stance based on cultural, religious, and tribal reasoning, both broadly and specifically. However, married women feel less pressure because their husbands' permission and satisfaction are all that matters. Married Saudi female drivers indeed consider their husband's approval the most important, whereas single women solely require parental approval. The current findings echo

previous research (Eldoseri et al., 2014; Al-Khateeb, 1998), highlighting the importance of Saudi male authority in marriage dynamics and emphasising husbands' control over their wives, as specified in marital agreements, which includes supervision of their wives' employment and productivity.

Bursztyn et al. (2018) also noted that male guardianship plays a significant role in labour choices in SA because husbands or fathers have the authority to choose whether women may seek employment outside of their homes. Although there is no legal obligation, there is a prevailing societal expectation for women to get consent from their male guardians before joining the labour market. Obtaining this authorisation is seen as essential for Saudi women to begin employment, irrespective of their own preferences or credentials. Nevertheless, with the implementation of transformative initiatives in line with the vision of the kingdom, novel behaviours have surfaced. This includes instances where Saudi individuals permit their female relatives to work as drivers, whether they personally support or oppose this type of employment. This phenomenon contributes to the emergence of a third category, namely, Saudi individuals who exhibit no explicit objection to the job itself but simultaneously refrain from actively endorsing or supporting it.

Drawing from a study by Alsharif et al. (2019), it's observed that although Saudi husbands typically hold power over decisions regarding external matters like employment, Saudi women frequently exert subtle influence to sway their husbands towards decisions that align with their preferences. In this third category, certain Saudi families or husbands adopt a neutral stance regarding this type of job, relinquishing decision-making authority to their daughters or wives if they want to become drivers. As explored in Chapter 5, Sections 5.5.6 and 5.5.7, the rationale behind adopting a neutral stance stems from the belief that women possess the right to engage in employment. However, cultural and religious factors introduce hesitancy or neutrality in their approach. For example, some husbands may consent to their wives working as drivers but

under specific conditions, while others may not endorse the idea at all but refrain from prohibiting their wives from pursuing such employment, acknowledging their right to work on platforms tailored for women. Another factor contributing to neutrality is the recognition of the necessity of such employment opportunities for Saudi women, given the cultural context wherein women are compelled not to interact with men, particularly in occupations such as transportation. However, some individuals remain uncertain or hesitant, feeling that it may be premature to embrace such an idea so swiftly.

The current study focuses on the experiences of Saudi women who choose to work as drivers, zooming in on the impact of family relationships and cultural standards on their ability to make autonomous choices. Although some women may express contentment with mandated behavioural standards, their independence and career potential are limited by household participation. Families often play a crucial role in the process of decision-making, either supporting, opposing or remaining impartial towards women pursuing careers as drivers. The participation of families is shaped by cultural, religious and tribal factors, with some families supporting women working as drivers under certain circumstances that prioritise safety and respect social norms. Families' choices to assist women drivers and maintain sex segregation are mostly driven by safety concerns, especially around encounters with male passengers. In contrast, several families strongly object to women pursuing careers in driving for cultural and religious reasons.

Married women experience pressure to seek consent from their husbands, which shows the importance of male dominance in marriage dynamics and work-related choices. Male guardianship continues to have a key role in SA as women are expected to seek permission from their male guardians before they may be employed. Nevertheless, there have been cases when people, in accordance with the kingdom's vision, let their female relatives work as drivers regardless of their personal opinions. This indicates a change towards a more impartial position,



in which families may give up their power to make decisions in women's favour, recognising their right to operate on certain platforms designed for women. In SA, the autonomy and professional prospects of women drivers are greatly influenced by family dynamics, cultural norms and male guardianship. These factors play a key role in moulding women's experiences in ride-hailing services.

#### **7.3.4 Driving as a Man's Job**

The findings of this study unveil varied perspectives among Saudi female drivers regarding the cultural suitability of working as drivers. Some participants maintained the belief that working as a driver is culturally and socially more suitable for men than for women. This belief stems from the perception that Saudi men face comparatively less societal pressure than Saudi women in various aspects of life, including employment choices such as driving. Indeed, unlike women, men are not typically expected to adhere to specific schedules for returning home, managing childcare responsibilities or engaging in cooking duties, which restrict only women's work as drivers. The differences between men and women in terms of transportation access, commuting distances and time use patterns were discussed by Madden (1981), Gimenez-Nadal and Molina (2016), Hjorthol (2000) and Saleh and Malibari (2021). According to their findings, women generally commute shorter distances than men. Furthermore, married women frequently modify their commuting schedules and working hours to align with the demands of their families, which illustrates the impact of the family life cycle on their travel behaviour.

These findings align with the perspectives of the participants in this study, who expressed a sense of diminished creativity in their roles as female drivers. For instance, cultural restrictions such as the expectation to return home early result in lower income levels than desired by Saudi female drivers. Relevantly, Cook et al. (2021) observed that male drivers demonstrate a greater likelihood of sustaining their involvement with Uber than their female counterparts. This

implies that male drivers exhibit a constant pattern in their work, enabling them to continuously enhance their expertise. Because of male drivers' higher level of experience, they earn more money per hour than female drivers. This earnings disparity is attributed to differences in experience levels rather than any inherent gender-based pay discrepancy on the Uber platform. Additionally, Saudi female drivers believe that the physical endurance required for the job plays a significant role, contributing to the perception that men perform better than women in this role.

According to some participants in this study, working as a driver requires the ability to drive safely with no fear, work anytime and anywhere, endure prolonged hours behind the wheel and manage various passengers. These aspects were discussed by the participants as areas in which men are better equipped to undertake this job for extended periods without encountering significant challenges. Similar findings have been noted in prior research, for instance, by Rosenblat and Stark (2016), who also observed that male drivers may choose to operate late at night, target regions with elevated crime rates during nocturnal shifts and employ strategic tactics to optimise their income even if this entails navigating potentially hazardous or demanding circumstances. Conversely, some participants argued that working as a driver may actually be more suitable for Saudi women than men due to the cultural settings prevalent in Saudi society. These participants contended that Saudi female passengers prefer to be chauffeured by Saudi female drivers exclusively, citing reasons such as privacy, safety, cultural considerations and religious adherence. This viewpoint aligns with the proposition outlined by Tarife (2017), who reports that current ride-sharing platforms like Uber and Lyft have been criticised for not adequately addressing these specific concerns, leading to calls for the development of a female-only ride-sharing application. Tang et al. (2021) also stated that some female riders and drivers may prefer or feel safer being matched with female counterparts due

to perceived safety and comfort considerations, a preference that reflects a desire for a sense of security and trust when using ride-hailing services.

To sum up, this study delves into the varied perspectives of Saudi female drivers regarding the cultural suitability of their role, juxtaposing societal expectations with practical realities. It highlights a prevailing belief among some participants that societal norms favour men over women in roles such as driving, citing factors like family responsibilities and societal pressures. This aligns with previous research indicating differences in commuting patterns and family obligations between genders. Moreover, the study notes disparities in earnings and job sustainability between male and female drivers, attributing them to experience levels rather than inherent gender bias on the platform. Participants also emphasised the physical demands of the job, suggesting a perception that men may be better equipped to handle them. Conversely, some asserted the suitability of women as drivers, particularly for female passengers who may prefer female chauffeurs for reasons of privacy and cultural comfort. These findings underscore the complex interplay of societal norms, gender dynamics and practical considerations shaping perceptions and opportunities for female drivers in SA.

#### **7.4 Cultural Readiness**

In contemporary SA, the evolving role of women in the workforce reflects a complex interplay of cultural backgrounds, familial influences, and societal expectations. BCT offers a valuable lens through which to examine these dynamics, highlighting how cultural and biological factors combine to shape Saudi women's willingness and readiness to enter non-traditional roles, such as drivers in ride-hailing services. This section explores Saudi women's embrace of careers as drivers in ride-hailing services, revealing that those from backgrounds with maternal employment or father absence display a greater inclination towards such roles, which is often attributed to upbringing emphasising self-reliance, a concept thoroughly examined in Section

5.5.1 of Chapter 5. According to BCT, this self-reliance can be seen as a biologically rooted trait that is nurtured in environments where traditional gender roles are less strictly enforced, thereby allowing for greater flexibility in career choices.

Exposure to female role models in the workforce positively influences women's willingness to pursue work outside the home, while adherence to traditional gender roles can pose barriers. BCT helps explain this by suggesting that seeing female role models in non-traditional roles can alter the perceived social constructs of gender, thereby modifying the biological and social expectations that women have for themselves. Despite challenges, there is a noticeable shift towards greater acceptance of women working as drivers in keeping with religious principles, although cultural norms persist. BCT suggests that this shift may be partially driven by an inherent adaptability in social structures that allow for gradual changes in gender roles while maintaining overall societal stability. Navigating these complexities requires discerning between religious teachings and cultural practices to foster progress towards gender equality and empower Saudi women in diverse career paths. From a BCT perspective, this discernment is crucial as it involves distinguishing between cultural norms that may be more rigid and biologically ingrained and those that are more flexible and subject to change through shifts in social and religious interpretations. By understanding these underlying factors, there is potential to support the empowerment of Saudi women in a manner that respects both cultural and biological considerations while also promoting gender equality.

#### **7.4.1 Differences in Cultural Backgrounds**

The results of this research suggest that the level of acceptability and desire to work as a female driver in ride-hailing services might be influenced by distinct cultural backgrounds. The findings also indicate that individuals whose mothers were employed or who grew up without fathers were more inclined to pursue work as drivers with no restrictions. Thus, the participants

argued that their upbringing instilled in them a sense of self-reliance, supported by their mothers, and emphasised not relying on others, such as a husband, to take care of them. This observation is consistent with the trend identified in the studies conducted by DeJong (2010) and Verma and Negi (2020), who indicate that daughters of working mothers tend to achieve greater career success, command higher salaries and foster more equitable relationships. This suggests a significant and multifaceted influence of maternal employment on their long-term outcomes. Another pertinent theory relevant to the cultural and social readiness of Saudi women is the concept of ‘skill transfer’ introduced by Haaland et al. (2013). According to this theory, children learn skills from their parents, and their parents’ skills and abilities influence theirs.

Therefore, Fernandez (2013) claims that women are more willing to work outside the house if they witness other women doing so. This implies that working female role models may motivate girls and young women to seek occupations outside of home duties. Conversely, other Saudi women may struggle with accepting this profession as a result of being raised by mothers who were not employed. Following a similar rationale, daughters acquire household and caregiving skills from their mothers, particularly if the mothers are homemakers; as they mature into adulthood, these daughters may prioritise homemaking roles in their own lives. This dynamic elucidates some Saudi female drivers’ hesitation to pursue work in ride-hailing services, as they have been conditioned and socialised to perceive homemaking as the primary role for women. According to Fogli and Veldkamp (2011), young women tend to first embrace their parents’ attitudes and then modify or revise them by watching the experiences and outcomes of women from the preceding generation.

In summary, this study sheds light on the complex interplay between cultural influences and familial upbringing concerning the readiness and willingness of Saudi women to embrace roles as drivers in ride-hailing services. While individuals raised by working mothers or in father-

absent households exhibit a stronger inclination towards such roles, which indicates cultivated self-reliance and independence, others may struggle with entrenched perceptions of homemaking as women's primary role. The presence of female role models in the workforce emerges as a crucial factor in inspiring Saudi women to challenge traditional gender norms and pursue careers as drivers. As Saudi women navigate both inherited attitudes and evolving societal expectations, creating a supportive environment with diverse role models is essential for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the realm of ride-hailing services.

#### **7.4.2 Shifting Perspectives**

The question of how socially acceptable it is to be a female driver for ride-hailing services emerged during the research, prompting responses that called for careful contemplation. The findings of this study reveal that society has become increasingly accepting of women driving, and working as a driver is no longer considered exceptional. According to the participants, many individuals who initially opposed the idea of women working as drivers have now become supporters of the concept. This shift in attitude is particularly notable given the unique privacy needs of Saudi female passengers, which are best addressed by female drivers. As a result, even Saudi men, who have been accused of patriarchal attitudes, now endorse the idea of women working as drivers, citing their perceived trustworthiness, confidence and discipline. This evolution in attitudes can be understood through the lens of BCT, which suggests that the interaction between cultural and biological factors can lead to a reshaping of societal norms, particularly as environments become more supportive of flexible gender roles. These perceptions are corroborated by the findings of a study conducted in Riyadh, SA, which concluded that aggressive driving behaviour is not prevalent among female drivers (Shariq et al., 2023). The study highlighted that all female participants demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of traffic rules and regulations.

Another noteworthy observation indicating a shift in perceptions is that women's employment as drivers does not conflict with religion but rather with cultural norms. This prompts some of the Saudi women drivers in this study to challenge these societal restrictions. For instance, from a religious standpoint, there is significant agreement and harmony between Saudi women drivers and their families regarding the decision not to interact with male passengers, in line with the principle of sex segregation. However, female drivers face challenges in adhering to particular societal norms, including expectations regarding their clothing, whether they should drive with their face uncovered or covered and considerations about avoiding certain times or locations unless it pertains to security concerns. The challenge of distinguishing between normative Islamic teachings and cultural practices was underscored in another study by Mulhem et al. (2020). This study indicates that due to the pervasive influence of religion in Saudi society, differentiating between Islamic teachings and cultural norms is not always simple. It necessitates a nuanced comprehension of both religion and culture, along with thoughtful consideration of historical and social contexts.

This suggests that the discrepancies between female drivers and their families may stem more from cultural rather than strictly religious factors, as some individuals find themselves caught in a cycle of rejection or hesitation. In sum, this study highlights a notable shift in societal attitudes towards women working as drivers in SA, with increasing acceptance observed even among individuals initially opposed to the idea. Notably, Saudi men, who are often associated with patriarchal views, now endorse female drivers, citing attributes such as trustworthiness and confidence. Additionally, research indicates that female drivers exhibit a satisfactory understanding of traffic regulations and demonstrate non-aggressive driving behaviour, debunking stereotypes. However, while the employment of women as drivers is not considered to conflict with religious beliefs, challenges arise from cultural norms regarding clothing, interactions with male passengers, and timing and location considerations. It's important to note

that this study did not provide direct evidence of this shift, and it would be beneficial to refer to other works that have focused on this aspect. These findings underscore the necessity of a nuanced understanding of both religious principles and cultural practices, emphasising the importance of considering historical and social contexts in fostering further progress.

## **7.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides a balanced analysis of the motivations and challenges faced by Saudi women working as drivers in ride-hailing services. Drawing on insights from interviews and relevant literature, it highlights the diverse array of factors influencing their decisions. These include push factors, such as societal constraints, familial opposition, and cultural norms, as well as pull factors, such as the desire for financial independence, flexibility, and the opportunity to navigate traditional employment barriers. The findings underscore the importance of work-life balance, showing how familial support or opposition significantly shapes the opportunities and decisions of Saudi women drivers.

Additionally, the chapter explores the evolving role of women in the Saudi workforce, revealing a complex interplay of cultural backgrounds, familial influences, and societal expectations. While there is a gradual shift towards greater acceptance of women working as drivers, persistent cultural norms continue to present significant barriers. The discussion also examines how government policies and initiatives aimed at empowering women in the gig economy influence these dynamics. By highlighting both progress and areas requiring further attention, the chapter contributes to a nuanced understanding of how societal norms, government policies, and individual agency interact to shape the professional paths of Saudi women in the ride-hailing sector. It underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to promote gender equality and empower women in diverse career paths within the evolving gig economy.



The application of BCT in this study adds significant value. BCT provides a theoretical framework that bridges biological predispositions and social constructs, offering a nuanced lens for analysing the experiences of Saudi women drivers. Unlike frameworks that focus solely on cultural or economic factors, BCT captures the interplay between inherent gendered behaviours and societal expectations. This approach illuminates the transformative potential of gig work as a space where traditional gender roles are both challenged and redefined. Furthermore, BCT offers practical implications for policymakers and ride-hailing companies. By reflecting the adaptability of gender roles and the cultural specificities of SA, it provides a robust foundation for creating supportive environments that empower women drivers and promote inclusivity in the gig economy.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion of Policy Implications**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The primary focus of this study is the experiences of Saudi women in ride-hailing services. However, the exploration of organisational dynamics and governmental policies provided valuable insights into the factors that both motivate and challenge Saudi women in this context. Through the lens of IIT, this chapter addresses Research Questions 3 and 4, which examine how evolving cultural norms and ongoing legislative efforts shape a broader institutional landscape that both supports and constrains women's economic and social empowerment. By identifying the motivating factors—such as financial independence, flexibility, and government incentives—and the barriers—such as cultural constraints, safety concerns, and regulatory challenges—that influence women's involvement in the ride-hailing sector, this research seeks to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and the wider community about the opportunities and challenges associated with advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the workforce.

IIT underscores the importance of understanding how Indigenous cultural practices, religious beliefs, and societal expectations influence the reception and implementation of governmental policies. In SA, where traditional norms play a significant role in shaping societal behaviour, governmental efforts to enhance women's participation in the workforce must navigate a complex landscape of institutional resistance and adaptation. This research highlights how governmental policies can be more effective when they are aligned with, or at least sensitive to, these deep-rooted cultural institutions. Through a nuanced understanding of these issues, stakeholders can develop more effective strategies and initiatives that not only promote the aspirations of Saudi women but also respect and incorporate the cultural context in which these women operate. The following sections of this chapter will delve into the key findings and

implications derived from this study, focusing on the evolving dynamics of women's participation in the ride-hailing industry in SA and the broader impact of governmental policies and societal norms on this sector.

## **8.2 Motivations**

The study investigates the burgeoning interest among Saudi women in working as drivers for ride-hailing services, shedding light on both societal acceptance and legislative initiatives aimed at empowering women in the workforce. Through the lens of IIT, it becomes evident that the motivations driving Saudi women to enter the ride-hailing industry are deeply intertwined with Indigenous cultural norms and institutional contexts. Despite varying levels of acceptance within Saudi society, ranging from initial scepticism to gradual encouragement, there is a discernible trend towards embracing women in this role. This shift is driven by factors such as practicality, social encouragement, and the compatibility of these roles with prevailing work choices and lifestyles, which are themselves shaped by long-standing cultural institutions.

IIT suggests that the decisions of Saudi women to participate in ride-hailing are not solely influenced by individual desires or economic needs but are also heavily moderated by the institutional framework within which they operate. For instance, the societal acceptance of women drivers, while initially limited, has been facilitated by cultural norms that emphasise the importance of modesty and gender segregation, leading to the development and acceptance of female-only ride-hailing services. These services align with cultural expectations, making them a culturally congruent option for women seeking employment outside the home.

Novel insights emerge from this study, notably the fact that some women enter the driving profession for networking opportunities rather than solely for financial necessity. This highlights the role of Indigenous institutions in shaping non-economic motivations, such as the desire for social connectivity and community engagement, which are deeply valued within the

Saudi cultural context. Organisational efforts, including tailored recruitment programmes and collaborations between government and business entities, complement broader legislative advancements, indicating significant progress in the promotion of women's rights and empowerment in SA. These initiatives, while modern in their implementation, must navigate and respect the Indigenous institutional landscape to be effective and sustainable.

Additionally, the study examines the cultural fit of women working as drivers, particularly within the context of female-only ride-hailing apps, highlighting their alignment with cultural norms and societal acceptance. IIT emphasises that the success of such initiatives is contingent upon their alignment with the Indigenous cultural values and social structures that govern gender roles in Saudi society. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving employment landscape for women in the region, underlining the importance of continued efforts to foster gender equality and empowerment in the transportation industry and society at large. By integrating IIT, this study underscores the necessity of crafting policies and organisational strategies that are not only progressive but also culturally resonant, ensuring that they meet the needs and expectations of Saudi women within their unique socio-cultural context.

### **8.2.1 Acceptance and Support**

The findings of this study underscore not only a rising demand from Saudi women to work as drivers in ride-hailing services but also legislative initiatives by the Saudi government aimed at further empowering them. On the drivers' level, there are varying degrees of acceptance within Saudi society, ranging from initial rapid to gradual acceptance and to encouraging women to work as drivers. Some responses from Saudi women even suggest that those who oppose the notion of women working as drivers do so because they believe the idea to be premature and not yet ripe for implementation rather than fundamentally flawed. Despite the

range of perspectives in Saudi culture about the employment of women as drivers, a trend is emerging towards embracing and endorsing this occupation. This shift may be attributed to many causes, such as practicality, social encouragement and compatibility with prevailing work choices and lifestyles.

Support and acceptance indeed stem from factors such as easy access to work, the manageable nature of the job and encouragement from others who speak positively about Saudi female drivers. The majority of the positive experiences highlighted in this study resonate with findings from other studies, including regarding women's engagement in digital platform work for income (Churchill & Craig, 2019), enjoyment of driving (Fauzi et al., 2022), appreciation for flexibility (Nelson et al., 2020) and pursuit of work-life balance (Veluchamy et al., 2021). However, some female drivers in this study worked as drivers because they sought networking opportunities rather than out of financial necessity. This finding is considered novel among studies on the subject and is related to the fact that Saudi women do not have financial obligations. By recognising and highlighting these unique findings, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors shaping women's employment decisions and inform more targeted interventions and policies to support their participation in the workforce.

On the institutional level, policymakers and stakeholders continually generate new ideas and offer support to empower Saudi women to work as drivers. Two programmes have been created to recruit Saudi women drivers, and these programmes are continuously subject to development and modifications to empower the largest possible number of Saudi women. These programmes target both full-time workers already involved in this activity and individuals seeking employment in this field. The collaboration between government and business entities underscores the multi-dimensional approach taken to support self-employment and job creation in the directed transportation sector. By combining resources, expertise and regulatory oversight, these programmes aim to empower individuals to pursue entrepreneurial

opportunities, enhance employment outcomes and contribute to the growth and professionalism of the transportation industry in SA. These results are consistent with the findings of Tawfik et al. (2020), which highlight that legislative and regulatory advancements signify substantial progress in promoting women's rights and empowerment in SA.

The findings of this study illuminate a growing demand among Saudi women for employment as drivers in ride-hailing services alongside legislative initiatives aimed at empowering them. Organisational efforts, including the creation of recruitment programmes tailored to Saudi women, underscore a commitment to maximising opportunities in the transportation sector through collaboration between government and business entities. These initiatives align with broader legislative advancements, representing significant progress in the promotion of women's rights and empowerment in SA. Continued collaboration and targeted interventions will be essential in sustaining this positive trajectory towards gender equality and economic empowerment in the country.

### **8.2.2 Cultural Fit**

One of the most positive aspects of the findings concerning work as a driver is its cultural suitability. This compatibility with cultural norms can significantly enhance societal acceptance and support for such jobs. The study shows that working as drivers on women-only apps offers a level of privacy that does not conflict with either religion or culture. In fact, the sex segregation enforced by women-only apps leaves no excuse for Saudi families to stop their female members from working as drivers given that interactions with men were their primary concern. By providing a platform for female drivers to cater exclusively to female passengers, these apps remove a significant barrier to acceptance and enable more women to pursue driving jobs without facing objections from their families. This explains the presence of numerous women-only applications in the Kingdom of SA as they represent not only successful ventures

at the individual level but also at the corporate level. According to IIT, the acceptance of women working as drivers in SA, mainly through women-only apps, can be seen as an adaptation of employment practices to align with deeply rooted cultural and religious norms.

In summary, the findings underscore the crucial role of cultural suitability in shaping acceptance and support for women working as drivers, particularly within the unique context of women-only ride-hailing apps. Alignment with cultural norms not only enhances societal acceptance of such employment opportunities but also addresses concerns related to privacy and cultural sensitivities, as observed in the Saudi context. This contrasts with previous research suggesting varying preferences for female drivers among female passengers, emphasising the importance of understanding and accommodating diverse perspectives. Moving forward, continued efforts to promote cultural suitability and inclusivity in employment opportunities will be essential for fostering greater gender equality and empowerment in Saudi society and beyond.

### **8.3 Barriers and Challenges**

This study also looks at the barriers and challenges encountered by Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing industry. Utilising IIT, these barriers can be understood as being deeply rooted in the institutional and cultural frameworks that shape Saudi society. Analysing the findings, the chapter explores three main areas of concern: face covering, interactions with male passengers, and payment issues. These challenges shed light on the intricate interplay between religious traditions, cultural norms, and employment practices within Saudi society.

The requirement for face covering, for instance, is not merely a personal choice but is embedded within a broader institutional context that governs gender relations and public behaviour in SA. According to IIT, this practice reflects Indigenous institutional norms that dictate appropriate female conduct in public spaces. For many Saudi women, adhering to face-

covering norms while working as drivers presents a challenge in balancing professional duties with religious and cultural expectations. This challenge underscores the tension between modern economic participation and traditional cultural values, making it a significant barrier for female drivers in the gig economy.

Interactions with male passengers further complicate the work of Saudi female drivers. In a society where gender segregation is a deeply ingrained institutional norm, the necessity to interact with male passengers can create discomfort and tension. IIT suggests that such interactions are perceived through the lens of institutional expectations regarding modesty and gender roles, leading to significant challenges for female drivers who must navigate these interactions within the confines of cultural and religious expectations. This issue also highlights the need for ride-hailing platforms to develop culturally sensitive policies that respect these institutional norms while providing safe and supportive environments for female drivers.

Payment issues also emerge as a significant challenge, particularly in a context where financial transactions and economic independence for women are still evolving within the broader institutional framework. IIT emphasises that these barriers are not just technical or operational challenges but are reflective of the broader institutional constraints that women face in accessing and controlling economic resources. For Saudi female drivers, payment issues may also be exacerbated by the existing cultural norms that limit women's financial autonomy, adding another layer of complexity to their participation in the gig economy.

By examining these challenges comprehensively, the discussion aims to offer insights into the experiences of Saudi female drivers and their implications for policy and platform development in the ride-hailing sector. Addressing these issues requires a nuanced understanding of the Indigenous institutional context, where policies and practices must align with cultural and religious norms to be effective. Creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for



Saudi female drivers is crucial for advancing gender equity and economic participation in the digital gig economy. IIT provides a framework for understanding how these barriers are constructed and maintained within the Saudi context, and it highlights the importance of culturally informed policy interventions that can effectively address these challenges.

### 8.3.1 Face Covering

The participants revealed that unlike on women-centric apps, Saudi female drivers are required to reveal their faces on Uber, purportedly for security reasons. Some managed to negotiate with Uber to reveal their faces only to management, not clients, to complete their registration. However, not all were successful in securing this arrangement, as some saw face unveiling as non-negotiable for religious and cultural reasons. For some women, working as a driver was not essential enough to justify compromising religious principles like not removing the niqab.<sup>6</sup> IIT helps explain this by highlighting how such practices are deeply rooted in the Indigenous cultural and religious frameworks that govern public and professional behaviour in SA. The niqab, therefore, is more than just clothing; it is an expression of Islamic identity and cultural significance, symbolising adherence to religious beliefs and cultural heritage for many wearers, as asserted by Chowdhury et al. (2019).

The findings of the present study also resonate with those of DeCoursey (2017), revealing a noteworthy aspect of Saudi women's societal dynamics, namely, the discussion of their adherence to traditional Islamic attire. IIT suggests that this adherence is not merely a matter of personal or religious choice but is institutionally embedded within the cultural fabric of Saudi society. DeCoursey's (2017) study points out the conspicuous absence of active discourse or deliberation among Saudi women regarding their commitment to wearing this

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<sup>6</sup> Saudi women and others in the Middle East wear the *niqab*. Depending on area and Islamic modesty laws, it covers the face except for the eyes. Recent social reforms have changed the *niqab's* strict enforcement in Saudi Arabia, but its cultural and religious significance remains (Ahmad et al., 2021; Tawfiq & Ogle, 2022).

attire, suggesting a deeply entrenched acceptance of these clothing norms within Saudi society. This absence of internal questioning or challenge implies a strong cultural and religious adherence to these norms, reflecting a broader societal acceptance of traditional practices. Consequently, the discussion surrounding the mandatory unveiling of faces on ride-hailing service apps unveils the multifaceted challenges faced by Saudi women drivers.

These challenges intersect with broader socio-cultural and religious considerations, underscoring the influence of Indigenous institutions in shaping not only individual behaviours but also organisational policies and practices. The niqab emerges not merely as a garment but as a symbol of identity and tradition, with significance that extends beyond mere sartorial choice. According to IIT, the resistance to unveiling is not simply a personal or religious stance but a reflection of the broader institutional resistance to altering long-standing cultural norms. In essence, these findings underscore the imperative of incorporating nuanced understandings of religious and cultural factors in employment policies and practices, particularly concerning Saudi women drivers. IIT provides a framework for understanding these challenges as part of the broader institutional context that shapes how cultural and religious norms are maintained and negotiated in professional settings.

### **8.3.2 Male Passengers**

The findings of this study shed light on a significant discrepancy faced by Saudi female drivers in the realm of ride-hailing services. Despite the availability of women-only ride-hailing apps, which serve as a crucial facilitator for Saudi women seeking employment as drivers, the study revealed a pervasive issue: unavoidable interaction with male passengers. A key motivation for many Saudi female drivers to enter this profession is the existence of these women-only ride-hailing apps, which provide a platform where they can operate within the confines of their conservative familial and societal expectations. However, the reality of having to engage with

male passengers on these supposedly women-centric platforms contradicts their preferences and expectations. This incongruence not only erodes trust between drivers and passengers but also instils doubts and hesitations regarding safety and the job itself.

Several reasons explain why female drivers encounter male passengers. They include situations where male passengers accidentally request rides from female drivers, instances where their ride requests were not accepted on other platforms or requests made on behalf of female family members such as sisters or wives. The findings of the present study corroborate those of a previous study conducted by Tarife (2017), which suggests that female participants in the sharing economy, whether as service providers or consumers, tend to prefer interacting with other female participants. In addition to religious reasons and cultural norms, this preference indicates a widespread belief that interactions between individuals of the same gender can help mitigate potential safety risks or uncomfortable situations, especially in scenarios involving face-to-face interactions. Moreover, this situation underscores broader societal norms and gender dynamics in SA, where strict gender segregation is the norm. The discrepancy between the intended purpose of women-only ride-hailing apps and the reality of male passenger interactions reflects the tension between modern employment practices and deeply entrenched cultural norms, as described by IIT. This tension arises as these platforms, while designed to align with traditional gender segregation, struggle to fully meet the societal expectations embedded within the indigenous cultural context of SA.

### **8.3.3 Payment Issues**

One of the challenges encountered by Saudi female drivers, especially in women-only ride-hailing apps like Wsslini, is difficulties in receiving payment. Supporting multiple payment methods should ideally simplify the process for both drivers and passengers, but it has caused numerous issues, particularly for the drivers. For instance, cash payments have become

frustrating for drivers because they allow passengers to easily avoid paying. When Saudi female drivers seek assistance and protection from the app, the app's management often blames the drivers, asserting that it is their responsibility to collect the money. This treatment has led some Saudi female drivers to adopt a very serious attitude towards their clients, such as requesting payment before the trip begins or accepting only bank transfers. Similar payment issues have been reported by Roy and Shrivastava (2020), who noted that freelancers often face challenges with payment protection even after completing and delivering their work. Despite fulfilling their obligations, they may experience delays or disputes in receiving payment for their services.

According to IIT, these payment challenges reflect the tension between traditional cultural practices and modern economic activities, where the introduction of new payment methods and systems clashes with established norms and expectations within the community. This lack of payment security leaves freelancers susceptible to financial losses and erodes their trust in both the platform and their clients. The issue arises from the limited payment options available to clients, despite the presence of several payment methods. For instance, the absence of Apple Pay on Wsslini has attracted significant criticism from drivers. As a result, some female drivers have temporarily stopped working with these apps, while others have decided not to return to work at all. Those who have completely stopped working for these apps have begun to operate independently, leveraging their networks and social media accounts. In conclusion, the payment-related challenges faced by Saudi female drivers on the Wsslini app underscore the need for systemic reforms and enhanced accountability on digital platforms. By prioritizing payment security and fostering a supportive environment for drivers, platforms can create a more equitable and sustainable gig economy that empowers all participants.

#### **8.4 Implications for Businesses**

The landscape of ride-hailing services in SA has undergone a significant transformation with the introduction of female drivers into the workforce. As these women navigate the complexities of this burgeoning industry, it is imperative to understand the nuanced challenges they face and the strategies they employ to handle them effectively. This investigation delves into three critical aspects of their experiences: safety concerns, peak hour scheduling and the emergence of Saudi women-centric ride-hailing applications. Regarding safety concerns, particularly sexual harassment and fraudulent activities, Saudi female drivers described their proactive measures and community-driven initiatives to address these challenges. Moreover, the study highlights the significance of cultural norms and societal expectations in shaping safety perceptions and responses in the ride-hailing ecosystem.

The investigation also sheds light on the disconnect between foreign management teams and Saudi female drivers regarding optimal peak-hour scheduling. This discrepancy underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and local expertise when designing operational strategies in the industry. Furthermore, the study underscores the urgent need for more Saudi women-centric ride-hailing applications to emerge as viable alternatives to international platforms like Careem and Uber. The limitations of existing women-centric apps, coupled with the challenges associated with working in mixed-gender apps, highlight the necessity for innovative solutions that prioritise the safety, preferences and long-term job viability of female drivers. Through a comprehensive exploration of these dimensions, this investigation seeks to provide valuable insights into the experiences of Saudi women drivers in ride-hailing services and pave the way for more inclusive and responsive solutions in the industry.

#### **8.4.1 Safety**

The investigation into the experiences of Saudi women drivers in ride-hailing services did not identify sexual harassment as a safety concern, which can be attributed to the proactive measures they take. Cultural norms such as reputation and honour, along with stringent laws, also compel society to be mindful not to infringe on others. However, this study confirmed various context-specific influencing factors regarding perceived risks associated with scammers impersonating rideshare passengers. Saudi female drivers who acknowledged the issue of receiving requests from foreign numbers are fully aware that this problem is regarded as a security gap, especially on the Wsslini app. The harm extends beyond merely falling victim to fake pick-up requests; it also encompasses the misuse of bank cards for fraudulent transactions. In response, WhatsApp and Telegram groups were established through the personal efforts of female drivers to expose these numbers as the issue remained unresolved by the app. The establishment of these grassroots initiatives underscores the proactive stance taken by female drivers in response to safety concerns in the ride-hailing ecosystem.

By leveraging their collective efforts and networks, female drivers seek to address security gaps and protect themselves and their peers from potential harm. Apps like Wsslini should promptly address these security concerns to ensure the safety and trust of their users, particularly in regions where cultural and societal norms may exacerbate vulnerabilities. Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of community-driven initiatives among female drivers for sharing information and protecting one another from potential threats. Moving forward, further research could delve deeper into the effectiveness of these grassroots efforts and explore potential collaborations between ride-hailing companies and local communities to enhance safety measures. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts could also provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by women

drivers worldwide and inform the development of more inclusive and secure transportation systems.

#### **8.4.2 Peak Hours**

The examination of the experiences of Saudi women drivers in ride-hailing services also brought to light not only the importance of cultural sensitivity but also the reluctance of foreign management teams to accommodate more suitable peak hours for drivers. The findings of this study suggest a disconnect between the understanding of optimal times for Saudi female drivers to maximise peak hour incentives and rewards and the perceptions held by foreign management teams. According to the study, foreign management teams overseeing ride-hailing services in SA may lack a nuanced understanding of the timing and circumstances that influence Saudi drivers' availability and ride-sharing behaviours. This lack of comprehension may lead to misalignment between the timing of peak hours set by management and the actual periods when Saudi drivers are most active and willing to accept rides.

The implications of these findings extend beyond mere operational efficiency to encompass broader socio-cultural considerations in the ride-hailing industry in SA. Addressing this disconnect requires a collaborative approach that integrates local expertise and perspectives into the decision-making processes of foreign management teams. By fostering greater communication and understanding between all stakeholders, ride-hailing companies can tailor their services to better meet the needs and preferences of Saudi female drivers, thereby enhancing overall driver satisfaction and retention rates. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of cultural competency training for foreign management teams operating in diverse markets to ensure sensitivity to local norms and practices. Moving forward, further research could explore strategies for enhancing cross-cultural communication and collaboration within

the ride-hailing industry, ultimately leading to more inclusive and responsive service delivery for all stakeholders involved.

### **8.4.3 Competitive Apps**

This study revealed an urgent necessity for more Saudi women-centric applications to emerge, competing with international platforms like Careem and Uber. The existing women-centric apps in ride-hailing services suffer from several disadvantages, including a lack of popularity, security flaws, insufficient client requests, and mysterious closures. These drawbacks have prompted some Saudi female drivers to cease working, convinced that this type of work provides only temporary relief. Additionally, several drivers attempted to circumvent the issues associated with women-only ride-hailing apps by working with mixed-gender apps. However, they were removed from these apps when they refused to pick up male passengers, which contravenes the apps' regulations.

Therefore, the emergence of more Saudi women-centric ride-hailing applications presents a crucial opportunity to address the unique needs of and challenges faced by female drivers in the country. The success of these platforms hinges not only on their ability to provide safe and reliable transportation services but also on overcoming the various shortcomings of existing women's apps. To effectively compete with international platforms like Careem and Uber, Saudi women-centric apps must prioritise factors such as popularity, security, client demand and government support. Moreover, it is imperative for these apps to offer sustainable solutions that provide long-term viability for female drivers rather than merely serving as a temporary fix.

The challenges associated with working on mixed-gender apps underscore the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment for female drivers in the ride-hailing industry. This includes implementing policies and practices that respect and accommodate their



preferences and safety concerns while also ensuring compliance with app regulations. As the demand for ride-hailing services continues to grow in SA, there is a clear need for innovative solutions that empower female drivers and cater to the unique dynamics of the local market. By addressing the limitations of existing women-centric apps and fostering a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem, potential new Saudi women-centric ride-hailing applications have the potential to drive meaningful change and improve the overall experience for both drivers and passengers.

To sum up, the limitations associated with operating on mixed-gender applications highlight the need for a friendly and inclusive ride-hailing environment for female drivers. The industry can create a fairer environment for all stakeholders by respecting their choices and safety concerns and following app regulations. This study shows that Saudi women drivers are resilient, resourceful and determined to navigate the ride-hailing sector. Addressing the obstacles they face and taking advantage of Saudi women-centric ride-hailing apps may improve inclusion, safety and pleasure for drivers and riders.

## **8.5 Implications for Policymakers**

Against the backdrop of shifting landscapes in employment opportunities for women in SA, this study delves into the intricate terrain of gig work, focusing specifically on the ride-hailing sector. The emergence of this sector as a viable option for female workforce participation marks a significant societal evolution, indicative of changing attitudes and aspirations. Within this dynamic environment, factors such as societal norms, individual preferences, and cultural considerations sculpt the contours of women's engagement in ride-hailing, reflecting both opportunities and challenges. However, amidst the burgeoning potential lies a complex tapestry of hurdles, ranging from restrictive eligibility criteria for support programmes to gaps in regulatory frameworks that fail to fully address the unique needs of female drivers.

To address these challenges, the study highlights the need for specific policy improvements. These include revising eligibility requirements for government support programmes to make them more inclusive of women working in niche or women-specific ride-hailing platforms, enhancing safety measures tailored to the needs of female drivers, and introducing flexible working conditions that accommodate the diverse roles and responsibilities of women in Saudi society. Additionally, there is a need to ensure that financial support programmes, such as those offered through government initiatives, are accessible to platforms like Wsslini, which cater specifically to female drivers. These recommendations underscore the imperative for gender equality and justice, calling for targeted legislative reforms and support programmes that acknowledge and accommodate women's diverse roles and responsibilities within Saudi society. The subsections that follow will provide a detailed analysis of these specific policy recommendations, offering actionable insights for policymakers. These subsections will explore the intricacies of funding programmes (Section 8.5.1), the challenges related to eligibility criteria (Section 8.5.2), and the broader implications for gender equality and justice (Section 8.5.3), each drawing from the findings of this study to inform strategies that can foster a more inclusive and equitable environment for women in SA's evolving gig economy.

### **8.5.1 Funding Programme**

This study points to the need for policymakers and stakeholders responsible for financial support programmes to reassess their strategies and address the shortcomings identified in existing initiatives. Despite the scarcity or limited success of female-centric ride-hailing apps, Wsslini has been identified as a prominent and favoured choice among both female drivers and riders in SA. However, the support programme targeting Saudi women drivers in ride-hailing services does not apply to the Wsslini app. This discrepancy highlights potential oversight in the allocation of resources and support, especially considering the significant impact that popular platforms like Wsslini have on the livelihoods of female drivers. Policymakers and

programme administrators must recognise the importance of inclusivity and equity in supporting all relevant stakeholders within the ride-hailing ecosystem, regardless of the specific platform they choose to operate on.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to understand the factors contributing to the success of platforms like Wsslini and leverage this knowledge to inform the development and enhancement of future support programmes. By aligning support initiatives with the preferences and needs of passengers and drivers, policymakers can maximise the effectiveness and relevance of their interventions, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and inclusive environment for women in the ride-hailing industry. Even world-renowned apps like Uber feature a women rider preference option, yet it relies on an algorithm that does not fully guarantee the exclusive selection of female passengers. Therefore, understanding the factors contributing to the success of platforms like Wsslini is crucial for policymakers seeking to enhance support programmes for female drivers in the ride-hailing industry. By examining the specific features and attributes that attract users to these platforms, policymakers can tailor support initiatives to better meet the needs and preferences of female drivers. This may involve providing financial incentives or resources to encourage the development and adoption of similar features by other apps, thereby enhancing their appeal to female drivers.

### **8.5.2 Eligibility Criteria**

The findings of this study underscore the complexity of the challenges faced by Saudi female drivers seeking to enrol in funding programmes designed to support them in the ride-hailing industry. The range of factors influencing perceived challenges includes stringent conditions imposed by both ride-hailing apps and government support programmes. Particularly noteworthy are the conditions related to car model requirements and the stipulation of full-time employment, which may exclude individuals such as regular students or government or private

sector employees. The emphasis on specific eligibility criteria highlights the need for a more inclusive and flexible approach to support programmes, one that takes into account the diverse circumstances and ambitions of aspiring female drivers. For example, women drivers are firmly convinced that the cleanliness of the car holds greater importance than the model. They argue that there is no benefit to having the latest model if the car is dirty and unkempt. Therefore, policymakers and programme designers should reconsider these conditions to ensure that funding opportunities are accessible to a broader range of individuals, including those balancing educational pursuits or part-time employment alongside their activities in the ride-hailing industry.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to provide transparent and accessible information about the requirements and application process for funding programmes, reducing ambiguity and potential barriers to enrolment. This study discovered that a minority of women are completely unaware of the programme while others believe that there is no need to participate in it whatsoever because they want less commitment. It is essential to address this latter misconception, which may stem from a lack of understanding of the programme's potential benefits or a perception that the associated requirements are too burdensome. By providing clear information about the support and resources available through the programme, policymakers can demonstrate its value in enhancing the financial stability and professional development of female drivers. Overall, promoting greater inclusivity and awareness of funding programmes for Saudi female drivers is crucial for empowering them to succeed in the ride-hailing industry. By addressing barriers to enrolment and dispelling misconceptions, policymakers can maximise the effectiveness and impact of support initiatives, ultimately contributing to the economic empowerment and social inclusion of women in SA.

### **8.5.3 Gender Equality and Justice**

The study's findings shed light on the intricate web of societal, cultural and legal factors that shape the experiences and opportunities of women in the ride-hailing industry in a conservative society like SA. The existence of regulations and laws that do not differentiate between men and women can create significant barriers for female drivers, leading to uncertainties and limitations to their participation. In SA, where traditional gender roles and familial structures hold considerable sway, women face unique challenges that may not be experienced by their male counterparts. Factors such as the requirement to obtain permission to work from their families, obligations related to childcare and household duties and cultural norms surrounding obedience to husbands contribute to the complexities of women's involvement in ride-hailing services. Furthermore, the study highlights female drivers' perception that establishing laws or support programmes that treat men and women equally may be unfair. This sentiment stems from the recognition that men do not face the same religious or social pressures as women and are therefore less likely to encounter similar challenges or obstacles in their pursuit of work opportunities.

Addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account the unique circumstances and needs of women in SA. Even though Saudi women drivers acknowledge and take pride in the kingdom's vision and efforts to empower women, the implementation of some reforms may not be straightforward. Thus, policymakers must work to create a supportive legal and regulatory framework that considers and accommodates the realities of women's lives, including their familial and cultural obligations. Additionally, efforts to promote gender equality should be sensitive to the nuances of local contexts, ensuring that policies and programmes empower women to participate fully in the workforce while respecting their cultural identities and social roles. Ultimately, achieving greater gender equity in the ride-

hailing industry and beyond will require a concerted effort to challenge and transform existing norms and structures that perpetuate inequality.

## **8.6 Chapter Summary**

The comprehensive findings of this study illuminate the evolving landscape of employment opportunities for Saudi women in the ride-hailing sector, offering valuable insights into the factors influencing their aspirations, challenges and experiences. As the discussion clarified at both the individual and governmental levels, Saudi women's growing interest in pursuing careers as drivers in ride-hailing services reflects a significant societal shift towards greater female workforce participation and empowerment. IIT provides a framework for understanding this shift by emphasising the role of deeply embedded cultural and institutional norms that both influence and are reshaped by women's participation in the workforce. The key to understanding this phenomenon is the recognition of the multifaceted influences that shape women's decisions to enter the profession. Societal attitudes, practical considerations and alignment with personal preferences and lifestyles are central drivers of this trend.

Moreover, the importance of cultural compatibility cannot be overstated, particularly on women-only ride-hailing platforms, offering women a sense of privacy and comfort while navigating the challenges inherent in their roles. IIT suggests that these culturally compatible platforms are not merely business models but also institutional adaptations that reflect and reinforce the prevailing cultural norms and values in Saudi society. Alongside these opportunities lie complex challenges and disparities that necessitate attention and action. From eligibility criteria for support programmes to broader societal and legal factors, Saudi female drivers face a range of hurdles that must be addressed through a comprehensive approach. According to IIT, these challenges are not just individual or organisational barriers but are rooted in the broader institutional frameworks that govern societal norms, gender roles, and

professional opportunities. It is imperative to recognise and confront these challenges sensitively, ensuring that initiatives aimed at empowering women are inclusive and culturally sensitive.

Furthermore, the study underscores the urgent need for gender equality and justice in the ride-hailing industry, particularly in conservative societies like SA. In this context, ‘justice and equality’ suggest that Saudi women should not be treated like men due to their many responsibilities. IIT highlights that gender equality in such a context must be pursued within the bounds of cultural and institutional frameworks that are unique to the region, requiring tailored approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all model. Legislative reforms and support programmes must thus be implemented with a nuanced understanding of cultural identities and realities to foster an environment conducive to women’s professional and personal growth. In conclusion, this study serves as a clarion call for sustained efforts to advance gender equality and empowerment in SA’s ride-hailing sector. IIT emphasises that these efforts must engage with and transform existing institutional structures to create lasting change. By addressing societal, cultural, and legislative hurdles, stakeholders can create an inclusive and supportive environment where women can thrive as drivers, which will contribute not only to their advancement but also to broader gender equality and societal progress within the kingdom.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The primary objective of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Saudi female drivers employed in ride-hailing services. In order to further the understanding of this phenomenon, an extra aspect was added by examining these experiences from an institutional viewpoint. Both the drivers and institutional levels are essential for comprehending the experiences of Saudi female drivers and making valuable contributions to local and transnational knowledge. Furthermore, these findings have the potential to not only enhance scholarly understanding but also guide targeted initiatives and policies that seek to foster gender equality and empowerment in the labour market. This chapter revisits the research's leading questions and evaluates the study's conceptual, methodological, and practical contributions. Subsequently, recommendations are delineated for institutions, policymakers, and female drivers, the limitations of this study are discussed, and suggestions for future research endeavours are presented.

### **9.2 Answering the Research Questions**

The present study focused on a sample of Saudi female drivers to address four primary research questions. The first two questions aimed to delve into the personal experiences, motivations, challenges, and perceptions of Saudi women involved in gig work as ride-hailing service providers. Through interviews with 22 female drivers, the study uncovered insights into their daily routines, interactions with passengers, feelings of empowerment or disempowerment, and the unique socio-cultural factors influencing their roles. The second two questions primarily focused on examining the role of government policies, regulations, and initiatives in shaping the participation of Saudi women in the ride-hailing industry. Interviews with representatives from the FWC and the TGA provided critical insights into how governmental strategies are



designed to promote female participation in gig work, particularly within the broader socio-economic and political context of SA.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding and gather evidence from multiple perspectives, the study also included interviews with representatives from two ride-hailing service firms, specifically Nawaaem and Amnuh apps. These interviews, though supplementary to the primary focus on government policies, offered valuable insights into the organisational practices within these platforms and how they intersect with governmental strategies. By exploring these interactions, the study was able to uncover additional layers of influence that shape the experiences and participation of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing industry. This multifaceted approach enriched the overall analysis, providing a more nuanced and well-rounded understanding of the dynamics at play in the intersection of policy, organisational practices, and drivers experiences.

**Q1: What motivates Saudi female drivers to participate in ride-hailing services, and how do these motivations align with their personal and professional aspirations?**

**Q2: What barriers and challenges do Saudi female drivers face in the ride-hailing sector, and how do these shape their experiences and satisfaction?**

Although the experiences of Saudi women working as drivers are diverse, they are often classified into three categories: positive, neutral and negative (see Chapter 5, Sections 5.2.1, 5.2.2, and 5.2.3). These experiences are contingent on cultural underpinnings, traditional roles and social norms, which primarily shape the attitudes of Saudi women when they consider employment as drivers. The first group comprises individuals who were raised in a relatively less conservative and more open-minded environment. For them, embracing a career as a driver is met with minimal resistance given that they perceive it as a necessary profession and a positive advancement beneficial to Saudi women. This study also identified several satisfaction

factors inherent in the experience of working as a driver for Saudi women, encompassing aspects such as flexibility, work-life balance, privacy, income, ease of requirements, self-worth, freedom and socialisation. As a result, these women may perceive driving as a means of empowerment and a way to break through societal barriers. These positive experiences highlight the multifaceted benefits and opportunities that driving offers to Saudi women, particularly those who perceive it as a means of personal and professional empowerment.

Second, individuals whose experiences were neutral and who perceived working as a driver to be average reported that their acceptance of this profession was primarily driven by the necessity of income. Unlike individuals in the first group, these women were not only reluctant to provide positive feedback but also to express negative sentiments, asserting that this profession solely serves as a means of earning income rather than facilitating relationship-building, socialisation and personal development. The experiences of individuals in this group reflect a pragmatic approach to employment as drivers, fuelled primarily by economic necessity rather than intrinsic satisfaction or positive perceptions of the profession. Although they may not actively dislike their work, they also do not find significant fulfilment or enrichment in it beyond its role in meeting their financial needs. This disparity in motivations among Saudi female drivers is intriguing, with some primarily driven by the desire for additional income while others consider income to be of lesser importance, instead valuing the opportunities for networking and social connections afforded by the role.

Third, individuals whose experiences were negative explained that their expectations were high and that they were dismayed by the inadequacy of ride-hailing apps. This situation typically arises for two reasons: First, some apps exhibit unfair practices towards drivers, particularly concerning payment issues and the guaranteeing of their rights. Second, the possibility of interactions with male passengers and encountering scammers has fostered undesirable feelings among female drivers, leading to a lack of trust in the apps' credibility regarding the protection

of their clients. Notably, the availability of women-only apps and the practice of sex segregation are the most significant reasons why these individuals' families gave them their approval to work in the transportation sector. Thus, criticism within this category is not inherently directed at the fact of working as a driver but rather at the performance of ride-hailing apps, indicating that they fail to fulfil their responsibilities adequately. This has prompted Saudi women to establish their own brand on social media platforms and operate as drivers independently, circumventing the regulations imposed by ride-hailing apps once they had expanded their network. The negative experiences of this group underscore the importance of addressing issues such as fairness, safety and trust on ride-hailing platforms to ensure a supportive and inclusive environment for female drivers.

Overall, although the experiences of Saudi women engaging in gig work as ride-hailing drivers are categorised into positive, neutral and negative, it is crucial to recognise the intersectionality of these experiences. Nevertheless, in this study, factors such as age, socioeconomic status, level of education and geographic location did not seem to play a significant role in shaping how Saudi women perceived and navigated their roles as drivers. This phenomenon can be attributed to the predominant influence of cultural and religious factors, which are prioritised in every aspect of Saudi women's lives. The findings showed that traditional gender roles and expectations often intersect with modern opportunities, shaping the way women view and engage with ride-hailing services. This concept has led women to feel the necessity of seeking permission from their husbands or parents to adhere to their conditions to be allowed to work. This requirement stems from deeply ingrained patriarchal structures and traditional gender roles that prioritise male authority and guardianship over female autonomy. Consequently, any efforts aimed at supporting and empowering Saudi women in gig work must take into account the intricate interplay of cultural and religious dynamics that shape their experiences and opportunities in the workforce.

The findings also shed light on a common perception among Saudi women engaged in gig work as ride-hailing drivers: even those who derive satisfaction from their job view it as temporary. This results from several factors, including the perception that gig work does not align with their desired reputation, lacks the job security typically associated with traditional employment and offers limited promotional incentives. While gig work may provide flexibility and autonomy, the absence of a guaranteed salary and advancement opportunities often leads Saudi women to see it as a stopgap measure rather than a long-term career path. According to the findings, the majority of Saudi women are engaged in this job as they await other job opportunities, either those they have applied for or new positions that they hope will become available. A very small percentage of Saudi women expressed a lack of interest in traditional jobs, stating that working as a driver currently suits them better as they do not have any immediate financial obligations necessitating the pursuit of higher-level employment. For these individuals, gig work meets their immediate financial needs and offers a level of satisfaction that outweighs the appeal of higher-level employment. This is also influenced by the societal expectation that men are the primary breadwinners and bear the majority of the financial burden, while women are responsible for managing household duties and caring for children.

**Q3: How have Saudi government policies influenced the recruitment, training, and participation of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing sector?**

**Q4: What opportunities and policy recommendations could further empower Saudi female drivers and promote inclusivity in the gig economy?**

These research questions were designed to investigate the phenomenon from governmental perspectives while also examining organisational initiatives aimed at encouraging Saudi women to engage in ride-hailing services as drivers. The findings related to these two questions revealed three distinct components aimed at supporting Saudi female drivers: (1) the issuance

of a free freelance certificate to obtain governmental assistance, (2) eligibility for purchasing a car under specified conditions and (3) the provision of financial support upon completion of a specific number of trips. All these benefits are consolidated under a single programme known as the Freelancing Support Programme, which is jointly administered by four entities: the MHRSD, the Public Transport Authority, Hadaf and the FWC. According to the findings, there is consistent collaboration between government bodies and ride-hailing companies, which aims to achieve outcomes that are mutually beneficial and effectively address any challenges that arise. This collaboration manifests in various forms, including efforts to enhance empowerment, foster competition among companies to create a more favourable work environment and devise more effective payment methods for customers. Thus, all entities involved are striving to enhance women's economic empowerment and contribute to broader socioeconomic development goals. However, this does not entail interference with any specific ride-hailing services as each app operates according to its own regulations.

This approach allows for a balance between government support and private sector autonomy in promoting women's participation in the ride-hailing industry while ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and standards. One example of alignment between government agencies and Uber is their mutual agreement that women drivers should prioritise serving female passengers, aiming for a minimum of 80%, thus avoiding male passengers when picking up clients to adhere to cultural norms. Efforts are also underway to localise the sector, as the Fund programme is exclusively available to Saudis, ensuring the Saudisation<sup>7</sup> of the industry. These examples highlight how partnerships between government agencies and private sector entities can navigate cultural norms and regulations to promote gender equality and empower

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<sup>7</sup> To achieve the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 and to lessen reliance on foreign labour, the Saudi government has implemented a program known as Saudisation, which seeks to increase the number of Saudi natives employed by private companies (Sobaih, 2023).

Saudi women in the workforce. However, this study revealed that the percentage of male drivers remains higher than that of women in ride-hailing services. This disparity can be attributed to various challenges surrounding the empowerment of women in this industry, including cultural considerations and safety concerns. Most significantly, all measures and plans developed were aimed at supporting both genders without exception and discrimination despite the fact that women often face more pressure than men.

In summary, the collaboration between government agencies and private ride-hailing companies aims to encourage women's involvement in the industry while respecting cultural norms and adhering to regulations. Efforts include initiatives like prioritising female passengers for women drivers, in keeping with cultural expectations, and localising programmes to support Saudi participation. Despite challenges such as cultural norms and safety concerns, measures are implemented to support both genders equally. This cooperative approach underscores a dedication to inclusivity and gender equality in the ride-hailing sector, regardless of the varying levels of influence it may have on women and men.

### **9.3 Fulfilling the Research Objectives**

To address the research questions in this study, specific objectives have been meticulously designed to explore the lived experiences of Saudi women working as ride-hailing drivers in the emerging gig economy. This context is marked by profound cultural, social, and economic transformations. The study's objectives extend beyond understanding individual experiences to encompass an analysis of the systemic factors shaping this phenomenon, including governmental policies, institutional challenges, and potential opportunities for collaboration with private sector organisations. Each objective contributes to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between gender, mobility, and economic participation within SA's unique socio-

cultural and policy environment. Table 17 outlines the key research objectives, mapping their alignment with the respective chapters in which they are systematically addressed.

*Table 17: Objectives of the research*

Objective Number	Description	Chapter/s
1	To understand the broader context of women's participation in the Saudi gig economy.	Chapter 2 (Literature Review)
2	To investigate the motivations behind Saudi women's choice to work as ride-hailing service drivers.	Chapter 5 (Findings Part I)
3	To identify the barriers and challenges Saudi women face in the ride-hailing sector.	Chapter 5 (Findings Part I) and Chapter 7 (Discussion of Female Driver Experience)
4	To assess the overall satisfaction of Saudi women working as ride-hailing service drivers.	Chapter 5 (Findings Part I)
5	To analyse how Saudi government policies and initiatives influence the recruitment, training, and management of female drivers.	Chapter 6 (Findings Part II) and Chapter 8 (Discussion of Policy Implications)
6	To explore the challenges the Saudi government faces in collaborating with ride-hailing companies.	Chapter 6 (Findings Part II) and Chapter 8 (Discussion of Policy Implications)
7	To identify potential future opportunities for government collaboration with ride-hailing companies.	Chapter 8 (Discussion of Policy Implications)
8	To develop policy recommendations aimed at empowering more women to participate in ride-hailing services.	Chapter 9 (Conclusion)

The objectives articulated in this study have been systematically pursued to generate both theoretical insights and practical recommendations. By exploring the motivations and barriers faced by Saudi women in the ride-hailing sector, the research highlights the complexities of gendered participation in the gig economy within a traditionally conservative society. Additionally, the analysis of governmental policies and institutional challenges provides a critical perspective on the role of the state in enabling or constraining women's economic empowerment. The findings further identify opportunities for enhancing collaboration between

the Saudi government and ride-hailing companies, emphasising the need for tailored initiatives to support female drivers. These insights culminate in policy recommendations aimed at fostering inclusivity and equity within the gig economy, aligning with the broader goals of Saudi Vision 2030. The next section discusses the contributions of this study in detail, addressing its theoretical advancements, empirical findings, and practical implications for gender empowerment and economic development.

#### **9.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

This research contributes to the understanding of the experiences of Saudi women in ride-hailing services and illuminates how cultural, policy, and economic factors intersect to shape the empowerment of Saudi women in the workforce. The review of existing research outlined in Chapter Two highlighted a gap in the literature concerning studies that specifically examine the gig work environment in the Saudi context. Consequently, the present study holds relevance for the academic community, government agencies, ride-hailing companies and corporate social responsibility initiatives with an interest in advancing gender equality, economic empowerment and inclusive economic growth in SA, particularly within the framework of Vision 2030.

Building on the literature review and the discussion of women's experiences in the gig work environment, the study identified several gaps in the current knowledge. While many scholars have found that women generally have positive opinions about utilising gig economy platforms to become independent workers (Perampalam, 2020; Norwani et al., 2022; Milkman et al., 2021; Churchill & Craig, 2019; Myhill et al., 2021), there is still ongoing debate among researchers concerning the motivating factors behind gig work, especially for women. On the one hand, several studies argue that digital work has positive effects on independent workers' happiness due to factors such as flexible working arrangements (Veluchamy et al., 2021),



minimal entry barriers and high autonomy for Uber drivers (Hall & Krueger, 2018), competitive and stable income (Berg & Johnston, 2019), opportunities for socialisation and support (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017) and control over working hours (Ravenelle, 2019). However, other studies have demonstrated that gig work, for instance, for ride-hailing services, comes with challenges that may hinder women's participation (Galperin, 2021; Milkman et al., 2021; Rosenblat, 2018; Vyas, 2021; Churchill & Craig, 2019; MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019; Piasna & Drahokoupil, 2017; Cook et al., 2021; Foong et al., 2018).

Yet, no single study specifically investigated the motivation and demotivation of women engaging in gig work in a country like SA, where culture and religion significantly influence societal norms. Therefore, the present study aimed to fill this gap in the literature by examining Saudi women drivers' experiences from different angles, including professional, cultural and religious perspectives. The results of this study may either help confirm existing findings or provide new insights, thereby addressing the gap in the current literature. For instance, numerous studies have suggested that gig work can induce feelings of isolation, psychological detachment, loneliness, discrimination and insufficient payment (Seetharaman et al., 2021; Rani & Furrer, 2021; Berg, 2016; Wood et al., 2019; Glavin et al., 2021; Caza et al., 2021). However, the Saudi female drivers in this study did not experience the issues raised by previous research. Instead, the aspect of social interaction was prevalent to the extent that some individuals pursued this type of job for enjoyment and networking purposes. Other findings indicated a lack of financial necessity for some Saudi female drivers because they are not required to be the breadwinners according to their cultural and religious beliefs.

The research also presents results that add to the ongoing discussion about the potential contradiction between gig employment and individual career progression (Chen et al., 2015; Brawley & Pury, 2016; Calo & Rosenblat, 2017). The experiences of Saudi women highlighted in the study underscore the importance of factors such as employment benefits, job security

and opportunities for training or advancement in shaping their perceptions of the significance and seriousness of gig work. The empirical findings show how the gig work experience can be more challenging or less conducive to individual career progression due to the absence of traditional employment benefits and opportunities for advancement. The Saudi women drivers in the study worked as drivers not just to demonstrate their capabilities but also as a symbolic gesture of empowerment after years of restrictions. This was seen as an initial step towards broader goals. Overall, this study contributes to the discussion by shedding light on the complexities and nuances inherent in the relationship between gig employment and individual career progression, particularly in specific socio-cultural contexts such as SA. It suggests that while gig work may offer opportunities for empowerment and income generation, it may also pose challenges to long-term career development, underscoring the need for further research and examination of these issues.

As evidence of this study's novel contribution, a comparative analysis was developed to juxtapose the push and pull factors influencing Saudi and Western women in the gig economy. While these findings have been discussed throughout the thesis, the table below consolidates and visualises the unique cultural, economic, and structural dynamics of Saudi women's participation in ride-hailing services. This comparison not only highlights the distinctiveness of the Saudi context but also situates the findings within a broader global framework, offering valuable insights for theory and practice. The table provides a succinct and impactful representation of the key findings, illustrating how the motivations, barriers, and opportunities for Saudi women diverge from or align with those of Western women. This synthesis is crucial for understanding the interplay of culture, policy, and professional dynamics in shaping gig work experiences across diverse contexts.

**Table 18:** *Comparative push and pull factors for Saudi and non-Saudi women in the gig economy*

Category	Saudi Women	Non-Saudi Women
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<b>Cultural and Social</b>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Traditional gender roles and societal expectations.</li> <li>- Patriarchal family structures and male guardianship.</li> <li>- Fear of reputational damage.</li> <li>- Limited acceptance in mixed-gender workplaces.</li> </ul>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender stereotypes associating women with caregiving.</li> <li>- Gender-biased hiring practices favouring men.</li> <li>- Fear of being perceived as less capable in professional roles.</li> </ul>
	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Female-oriented platforms align with cultural norms (e.g., sex segregation).</li> <li>- Growing social acceptance of women in unconventional roles.</li> <li>- Trust in female drivers for privacy and safety.</li> </ul>	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increasing societal acceptance of women in unconventional roles.</li> <li>- Gig platforms offer equal opportunities for female participation.</li> <li>- Positive perception of reliability.</li> </ul>
<b>Professional</b>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nepotism and wage disparity in traditional workplaces.</li> <li>- Career stagnation in conventional sectors.</li> </ul>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited career advancement opportunities in gig roles.</li> <li>- Persistent wage gaps.</li> <li>- Uncertainty about career progression in gig work.</li> </ul>
	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunities to develop new skills (e.g., branding, communication).</li> <li>- Lower barriers to entry compared to traditional employment.</li> </ul>	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Skill-building opportunities through freelance gigs.</li> <li>- Independence from traditional hierarchies and formal career structures.</li> </ul>
<b>Work-Life Balance</b>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rigid schedules in conventional jobs make balancing family duties challenging.</li> <li>- Cultural expectations for caregiving and household responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rigid work hours in traditional employment.</li> <li>- Caregiving roles disproportionately burden women.</li> </ul>
	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility to align work with family duties.</li> <li>- Autonomy in deciding work hours and locations.</li> </ul>	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Temporal and spatial flexibility to manage work and family schedules.</li> <li>- Ability to reduce commute time and focus on family responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic</b>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial necessity to support household income.</li> <li>- Limited access to traditional jobs due to social restrictions.</li> </ul>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial insecurity in gig roles.</li> <li>- Pay negotiation disadvantages and lower earnings compared to men.</li> </ul>

	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Path to financial independence from male guardians.</li> <li>- Low entry barriers into gig platforms.</li> </ul>	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic empowerment for single mothers and low-income earners.</li> <li>- Freedom to generate income without employer constraints.</li> </ul>
<b>Empowerment</b>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Societal stigma against unconventional roles.</li> <li>- Male guardianship limiting autonomy.</li> </ul>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Isolation due to the remote nature of gig work.</li> <li>- Lack of mentorship or organisational support.</li> </ul>
	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gig work challenges traditional stereotypes and builds self-confidence.</li> <li>- Women gain autonomy in making personal and professional decisions.</li> </ul>	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Breaking traditional gender stereotypes through independent gig work.</li> <li>- Gaining confidence and control through self-managed work.</li> </ul>
<b>Skill Development</b>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational underutilisation in traditional roles due to societal constraints.</li> <li>- Limited access to formal professional training.</li> </ul>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overqualification risks for educated women in gig roles.</li> <li>- Gender disparities in feedback and ratings on platforms.</li> </ul>
	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning and honing new skills (e.g., communication, branding).</li> <li>- Exposure to diverse work environments.</li> </ul>	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunities for professional development in soft and technical skills.</li> <li>- Potential to build an independent brand or customer base.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy and Structural</b>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural norms and male guardianship laws restrict women's full participation in the workforce.</li> <li>- Lack of gig-specific labour protections or benefits.</li> </ul>	<b>Push:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Absence of benefits like health insurance and retirement plans.</li> <li>- Job instability and potential platform deactivation.</li> </ul>
	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Government initiatives (e.g., Vision 2030) promoting women's inclusion in the workforce.</li> <li>- Adaptable gig roles tailored to cultural constraints.</li> </ul>	<b>Pull:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dynamic work environment offering a variety of roles.</li> <li>- Gig work's flexible requirements make it accessible to diverse demographics.</li> </ul>

To sum up, this research holds significant value due to its comprehensive examination of the experiences of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing industry, a topic that has been largely overlooked in the existing literature. By shedding light on the intersection of cultural, policy

and economic factors influencing women's participation in gig work, the study not only fills a critical gap in understanding but also offers valuable insights for policymakers, businesses and society at large. Understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by Saudi women in gig work contributes to academic knowledge as well as informs practical implications and policies aimed at promoting gender equality and empowerment in the workforce. Moreover, the research provides a foundation for further exploration of the complexities of contemporary employment arrangements in specific socio-cultural contexts, offering pathways for future research and initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive economic growth and social development in SA and beyond.

## **9.5 Recommendations**

This study identified certain push and pull factors influencing Saudi women who engage in ride-hailing services. The experiences of Saudi female drivers were articulated, providing insightful information on the viewpoints of gig workers. These considerations lead to several suggestions for practical and policy-related actions, which may be especially beneficial for Saudi female drivers and the people and organisations that interact with customers from local or foreign backgrounds, particularly when dealing with persons from conservative cultures who prioritise their own values. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made.

### **9.5.1 Policy Recommendations**

While the study's results indicate governmental endorsement of equality and empowerment in ride-hailing services, additional findings underscore the significance of societal preparation before fostering empowerment. First, it is recommended that policymakers organise exclusive opportunities tailored specifically to women in the ride-hailing sector. These opportunities could include targeted training programmes, networking events and mentorship initiatives

aimed at empowering women to succeed in this industry. Policymakers can collaborate with Saudi female drivers to address the challenges posed by traditional gender roles and stereotypes, thereby fostering a more equitable and inclusive society that recognises and values women's contributions in all sectors, including transportation. By creating dedicated spaces for women working in ride-hailing services, policymakers can help address existing barriers and promote inclusivity. Female drivers can also form supportive communities for gig workers, where they can network, share experiences and access resources for navigating the challenges of gig work. This may be facilitated through online forums, peer support groups or community events catering specifically to gig workers' needs.

Second, instead of merely aiming for equality, policymakers should focus on achieving equity in the ride-hailing sector. This involves recognising and addressing the unique challenges and barriers that women face, such as safety concerns, access to resources and cultural biases. The findings indicated that Saudi female drivers face greater responsibilities, restrictions, barriers and cultural expectations than men. Thus, by prioritising equity, policymakers can ensure that women have equal opportunities to thrive and succeed in the ride-hailing sector. Rather than generalising rules, support and opportunities for men and women, policymakers can develop policies and interventions that effectively target the root causes of gender inequality in the industry. Indeed, policymakers should engage with women drivers, ride-hailing companies, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to develop inclusive policies and strategies that address the specific challenges faced by women in the sector. This collaborative approach can help ensure that policies are effectively implemented and respond to the needs of women drivers.

The findings also reveal that the government's funding programme does not support all ride-hailing apps, thereby limiting women from accessing this governmental support, especially those who work exclusively with women-only apps. This not only constrains female drivers

but also contradicts the government and its vision for empowering women. To remedy this situation, policymakers and government agencies should consider the following recommendations. First, government support programmes for the ride-hailing sector should adopt inclusive eligibility criteria that do not discriminate based on the gender composition or focus of the ride-hailing app. Instead, eligibility should be based on factors such as compliance with regulatory requirements, safety standards and service quality, ensuring that all ride-hailing apps, including women-only platforms, have equal access to government support. Second, recognising the unique challenges and contributions of women-only ride-hailing apps, policymakers should consider implementing tailored support initiatives specifically designed to assist these platforms. This may include targeted funding, training programmes or capacity-building initiatives aimed at empowering female drivers and fostering the growth of female-led businesses in the ride-hailing sector.

Third, policymakers should engage in dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders, including ride-hailing companies, industry associations and women, to better understand the needs and concerns of female drivers and identify opportunities to address barriers to access to government support. By involving relevant stakeholders in the policymaking process, policymakers can develop more informed and effective strategies for promoting gender equality and inclusion in the ride-hailing sector. Fourth, government agencies responsible for administering support programmes should conduct targeted awareness and outreach campaigns to ensure that female drivers, particularly those working with women-only apps, are aware of the available support mechanisms and how to access them. This may involve disseminating information through various channels, such as online portals, social media and community events, to reach a wide audience of female drivers. Finally, to ensure the effectiveness and impact of government support programmes, policymakers should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the distribution of funds, assess the uptake of support

initiatives and measure the outcomes for female drivers. This data-driven approach can inform ongoing policy adjustments and investments to address any disparities or gaps in access to government support for female drivers.

### **9.5.2 Business Recommendations**

This study demonstrates that hiring women entails a wide array of changes and challenges across various domains, extending beyond client interactions, safety concerns and income considerations. It involves addressing cultural sensitivities for some women drivers and ensuring that nothing contravenes their beliefs. One crucial recommendation is to implement cultural sensitivity training programmes specifically tailored to women drivers. These programmes should aim to educate both drivers and ride-hailing companies about the diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs of female drivers. By fostering cultural awareness and understanding, policymakers can help create a more inclusive, encouraging, and supportive environment for women drivers, ensuring that their beliefs and values are respected. Additionally, ride-hailing companies should work closely with policymakers to implement policies and practices that accommodate the diverse needs of women drivers. This may include providing flexible working arrangements, such as allowing drivers to choose their preferred working hours or locations, to accommodate their individual circumstances and cultural sensitivities.

As depicted in the findings, Saudi female drivers tend to prioritise family consent or spousal approval, prefer working with women-only apps and avoid working with male passengers or uncovering their faces. Ride-hailing apps can support this by ensuring that women drivers in the ride-hailing sector feel respected, supported and empowered to navigate the challenges and changes they may encounter. For instance, ride-hailing companies can reassure and support Saudi female drivers and their families by demonstrating the highest security and safety



measures, implementing facial image activation only for the app's administration team and ensuring that women do not interact with men except at their request. This can help create a more comfortable and inclusive environment for Saudi female drivers, enabling them to work with greater peace of mind and confidence. By taking these proactive steps to support and empower Saudi female drivers, ride-hailing apps can help create a more welcoming and accommodating environment in the sector, ultimately benefiting both drivers and passengers alike.

The second key recommendation for ride-hailing companies is to prioritise the safety and security of Saudi female drivers. According to the findings, some female drivers had to contend with fraudulent activities, including the use of fake and foreign phone numbers attempting to scam them. Ride-hailing apps can mitigate this risk by implementing additional safety checks and verification procedures for passengers before they engage with drivers. Building on this recommendation, ride-hailing companies can also put in place several strategies for mitigating the risk of fraudulent activities: (1) enhanced passenger verification, (2) phone number authentication, (3) fraud detection algorithms, (4) in-app communication channels and (5) education and awareness. Ride-hailing companies can develop and deploy fraud detection algorithms that analyse passenger behaviour and booking patterns to identify suspicious activities, such as multiple bookings from the same phone number or unusual payment methods. By implementing these additional safety checks and verification procedures, ride-hailing companies can enhance the safety and security of Saudi female drivers and create a more trustworthy and reliable platform for both drivers and passengers. This proactive approach can help mitigate the risk of fraudulent activities and foster a safer environment.

The findings revealed that the use of dashcams can significantly enhance the safety and confidence of Saudi female drivers in the ride-hailing sector. As a key recommendation for ride-hailing companies, the integration of dashcams into their platforms can serve several

purposes: (1) deterrence of misconduct, (2) evidence collection, (3) personal safety, (4) peace of mind and (5) accountability and transparency. Thus, the integration of dashcams into ride-hailing platforms can serve as a valuable safety measure for Saudi female drivers, empowering them to navigate their roles with confidence and security. Ride-hailing companies should consider implementing dashcam policies and providing support for drivers to access and utilise this technology effectively.

Another evidence-based recommendation is to ensure the financial rights of Saudi female drivers as several cases emerged where the driver did not receive her due payment. Multiple payment options have been offered to customers, but the effectiveness of these options has not yet been evaluated by the apps. Instead, female drivers are often held responsible for their financial issues. Ensuring the financial rights of Saudi female drivers is paramount to their empowerment and success in the ride-hailing sector. Building on this recommendation, ride-hailing companies should take proactive measures to address issues related to payment discrepancies and ensure fair and timely compensation for female drivers. Ride-hailing apps can take several steps to uphold the financial rights of Saudi female drivers.

First, ride-hailing companies should establish clear and transparent payment policies outlining the terms and conditions for driver compensation. This includes detailing payment rates, commission structures and payment processing timelines to ensure that female drivers understand their financial rights and entitlements. Second, while offering multiple payment options to customers is important for convenience, ride-hailing apps must also prioritise the effectiveness and reliability of these payment methods. Companies should monitor the performance of different payment options and promptly address any issues or delays to prevent female drivers from experiencing financial hardships due to payment processing issues. Third, in cases where female drivers encounter payment discrepancies or issues with their earnings, ride-hailing companies should establish efficient mechanisms for dispute resolution. This

includes providing channels for drivers to report payment-related issues and ensuring that disputes are addressed promptly and fairly to uphold the financial rights of female drivers.

Fourth, ride-hailing companies should take responsibility for payment issues and refrain from placing undue blame or responsibility on female drivers. Instead of holding drivers solely responsible for financial issues, companies should investigate the root causes of payment discrepancies and take corrective actions to prevent recurrence in the future. Fifth, providing financial education and support resources to female drivers can empower them to manage their earnings effectively and advocate for their financial rights. Ride-hailing companies can offer training sessions, workshops or online resources covering topics such as budgeting, financial planning and understanding payment statements to help female drivers navigate their financial affairs confidently. By implementing these measures, ride-hailing companies can ensure that the financial rights of Saudi female drivers are upheld, fostering a fair and equitable working environment in the ride-hailing sector. Upholding financial rights not only benefits female drivers individually but also contributes to the overall sustainability and success of the ride-hailing ecosystem.

## **9.6 Limitation and Future Research**

This study has made a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding the experiences of Saudi women drivers and legislation pertaining to ride-hailing apps. However, it is important to acknowledge several limitations inherent in this research. The constraints, along with suggestions for further research, are outlined below.

This study focuses on Saudi female drivers, and one of the primary challenges encountered during the research was recruiting participants for interviews. The conservative nature of the environment and cultural norms prevalent in the region contributed to this difficulty, particularly for a male researcher. Conducting such research with a female researcher could

potentially attract more participants, as women may feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with someone of the same gender. A larger participant pool would likely provide additional insights into the phenomena under investigation. Future research should consider employing female researchers to conduct studies involving sensitive topics or gender-specific experiences, such as those related to female drivers in conservative societies. Having a researcher of the same gender as the participants may foster trust and create a more comfortable environment for sharing experiences, potentially enhancing participant recruitment and data quality.

Additionally, efforts should be made to broaden the participant pool to include a more diverse range of perspectives. This could involve targeting specific demographics within the female driver population, such as age groups, socio-economic backgrounds or geographical regions, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges faced. Conducting comparative studies across different cultural contexts could also provide valuable insights into the influence of cultural norms and societal expectations on female drivers' experiences. Contrasting the experiences of female drivers in conservative societies with those in more liberal or gender-inclusive environments could highlight the unique challenges and opportunities present in each setting. Finally, longitudinal studies tracking the experiences of female drivers over time could offer insights into the evolving dynamics of gender roles, societal attitudes and policy interventions related to women's participation in driving. Understanding how perceptions and experiences change over time can inform the development of more effective interventions and policies to support female drivers.

In terms of documentation, access to data from ride-hailing companies or government agencies has been limited, which may have constrained my ability to analyse trends or patterns in the industry. Collaborating with industry partners or accessing anonymised data sets could enhance the rigour and robustness of future studies. Thus, establishing collaborations with ride-hailing

companies or government agencies could facilitate access to valuable data sets for future research endeavours. By partnering up with industry stakeholders, researchers can gain access to anonymised data on various aspects of the ride-hailing ecosystem, such as user behaviour, driver demographics and service utilisation patterns. These data sets offer a wealth of information that can be analysed to identify trends, assess the impact of regulatory changes and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in the ride-hailing industry. By harnessing such data, researchers can generate evidence-based insights that inform policy decisions and industry practices.

Another limitation of this study pertains to securing the participation of larger companies such as Uber and Careem in the research. Indeed, conducting interviews with these international entities could offer valuable insights into their operations and their approach to women's empowerment in the Saudi context. Therefore, future research should prioritise efforts to engage with larger ride-hailing companies operating in the Saudi market. Establishing collaborative partnerships with these companies can produce valuable insights into their operations, strategies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment in the Saudi context. By fostering dialogue and cooperation, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by these companies in advancing gender equality and inclusivity in their services. Conducting in-depth case studies and interviews with senior executives or key decision-makers in larger ride-hailing companies can also provide rich qualitative data about their approach to women's empowerment in SA. Exploring the motivations, challenges and strategies employed by these industry leaders can thus offer valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of gender inclusion in the ride-hailing sector and inform future policy and advocacy efforts.

In conclusion, despite its limitations, including the time constraints of this doctoral study, challenges in participant recruitment, accessing comprehensive data and obtaining consent

from larger companies, this study provides a valuable foundation for further research on the gig economy, particularly the ride-hailing service sector. By addressing these limitations and embracing opportunities for collaboration with industry stakeholders, future research can build on the insights generated by this study to deepen the understanding of the dynamics shaping women's experiences and empowerment in the context of ride-hailing services. Through continued exploration and analysis, researchers can contribute to advancing knowledge and informing policy and practice in the evolving landscape of the gig economy.

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## Appendix 1: Confirmation Letter to MHRSD



Leadership Organisations and Behaviour  
Henley Business School

University of Reading,  
Reading, Berkshire, RG6 6AH

Tel: +44 (0)118 378 8691

<http://www.henley.ac.uk/school/leadership-organisations-and-behaviour/>

[henley.ac.uk](http://www.henley.ac.uk)

8 March 2023

Dear sir or madam,

**Re: Faris Alsaedi**

I am writing to confirm that Faris Alsaedi is a PhD student in the department of Leadership, Organisations and Behaviour at Henley Business School, the University of Reading. His student number is \_\_\_\_\_ and his supervisors are Professor Ben Laker and Professor Abby Ghobadian. Faris' maximum registration date for completing his studies is 19 September 2025 and his contact details are listed below:

Phone Number:

Email: [f.alsaedi@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:f.alsaedi@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

Faris' research topic is 'Saudi Women in Gig Work Environment: Perceptions, Practices, and Experiences'. He was granted ethical approval to conduct this research from the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee on 6 March 2023. The approval reference number is SREC-HBS-20220704-FAAL8773.

If you need any further information, my contact details are included above.

Yours sincerely,

**Alex Baker**

**Support Administrator**



## Appendix 2: Confirmation Letter to TGA



Leadership Organisations and Behaviour  
Henley Business School

University of Reading,  
Reading, Berkshire, RG6 6AH

Tel: +44 (0)118 378 8691

<http://www.henley.ac.uk/school/leadership-organisations-and-behaviour/>

henley.ac.uk

24 May 2023

Dear sir or madam,

**Re: Faris Alsaedi**

I am writing to confirm that Faris Alsaedi is a PhD student in the department of Leadership, Organisations and Behaviour at Henley Business School, the University of Reading. His student number is \_\_\_\_\_ and his supervisors are Professor Ben Laker and Professor Abby Ghobadian. Faris' maximum registration date for completing his studies is 19 September 2025 and his contact details are listed below:

Phone Number:

Email: f.alsaedi@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Faris' research topic is 'Saudi Women in Gig Work Environment: Perceptions, Practices, and Experiences'. He was granted ethical approval to conduct this research from the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee on 6 March 2023. The approval reference number is SREC-HBS-20220704-FAAL8773.

If you need any further information, my contact details are included above.

Yours sincerely,

**Alex Baker**

**Support Administrator**



Page 2

### Appendix 3: Supervisor's Letter to Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau



Dr. Abby Ghobadian, FBAM, FAcSS, CCMI  
Department of Leadership, Organisations and Behaviour  
Telephone: +44(0)118 378 4042  
E-mail: [abby.ghobadian@henley.ac.uk](mailto:abby.ghobadian@henley.ac.uk)

4 May 2023

Dear Sir / Madame

Re: Mr Faris Alsaedi

The purpose of this letter to conform that Mr Faris Alsaedi is a full-time second year doctoral student at the University of Reading supervised by myself. His thesis examines experiences of Saudi Women in Gig Work Environment and its implications. Faris needs to return to Saudi Arabia at the end of (July) and remain there for around (3 months) in order to collect the data necessary for his research. While away in Saudi Arabia Faris will be in constant contact with myself and the rest of supervisory team receiving supervision and appraising us of his progress.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistant.

Sincerely,

Dr. Abby Ghobadian, FBAM, FAcSS, CCMI  
Professor of Management  
Past President of the British Academy of Management  
Co-Editor of Journal of Strategy and Management

## Appendix 4: Confirmation Letter from FWC

Leadership Organisations and Behaviour  
Henley Business School

University of Reading,  
Reading, Berkshire, RG6 6AH

Tel: +44 (0)118 378 8691

<http://www.henley.ac.uk/school/leadership-organisations-and-behaviour/>

[henley.ac.uk](http://www.henley.ac.uk)

20 June 2023

Dear sir or madam,

**Re: Faris Alsaedi**

I am writing this to confirm that Faris Alsaedi has approached us based on his academic requirement, to help him on his research mentioned below. I would like to confirm that Future Work is not financially /liable obligated any ways to the research nor to the study of Faris Alsaedi

Faris' research topic is 'Saudi Women in Gig Work Environment: Perceptions, Practices, and Experiences'. He was granted ethical approval to conduct this research from the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee on 6 March 2023. The approval reference number is SREC-HBS-20220704-FAAL8773.

If you need any further information, my contact details are included above.

## Appendix 5: Confirmation Letter from TGA



### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERNS

This is to confirm that Faris Alsaedi has approached us based on his academic requirement, to help him on his research mentioned below. We would like to confirm that **“Transport General Authority”** is not financially /liable obligated any ways to the research nor to the study of Faris Alsaedi.

Faris' research topic is **“Saudi Women in Gig Work Environment: Perceptions, Practices, and Experiences”**. He was granted ethical approval to conduct this research from the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The approval reference number is SREC-HBS-20220704-FAAL8773.

If you need any further information, my contact details are included above.

Eng. Abdulaziz S. Al Shaer

Director of Taxi & Ride Hailing Department

## Appendix 6: Confirmation Letter from Amnuh



مؤسسة أمنة للنقل البري

س ت: ١٠١٠٦٠٠٦٦٤

جوال: ٠٥٥٧٧٣٣٧٥٧

Leadership Organisations and Behaviour  
Henley Business School

University of Reading, Reading, Berkshire, RG6 6AH

Tel: +44 (0)118 378 8691 <http://www.henley.ac.uk/school/leadership-organisations-and-behaviour/>

[henley.ac.uk](http://henley.ac.uk)

Dear sir or madam,

Re: Faris Alsaedi

I am writing this to confirm that Faris Alsaedi has approached us based on his academic requirement, to help him on his research mentioned below. I would like to confirm that AMNUH is not financially liable obligated any ways to the research nor to the study of Faris Alsaedi

Faris' research topic is 'Saudi Women in Gig Work Environment: Perceptions, Practices, and Experiences'. He was granted ethical approval to conduct this research from the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee on 6 March 2023. The approval reference number is SREC-HBS-20220704-FAAL8773.

If you need any further information, my contact details are included above





## Appendix 7: Consent Form for Saudi Female Drivers

### استمارة موافقة السائقات السعوديات في النقل الموجه -

20/06/2023

تم إعلامي بأهداف ومقاصد مشروع الباحث فارس الصاعدي

أفهم ما يلي:

- لا يوجد ضغط للاستمرار ، لدي الحرية الكاملة في التوقف في أي لحظة .
- ستبقى البيانات ، بما في ذلك ردود المقابلة الخاصة بي ، سرية ومجهولة الهوية ، وتستخدم فقط للأغراض البحثية .
- إذا لم أمنح الباحث الإذن بالمقابلة على المقابلة للدراسات المستقبلية واستخدام بعض اقتباساتي في دراسته ، فسوف يتخلص من بياناتي .
- سيتم تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً لأغراض تحليل الإجابات فقط .

\* الاسم المستعار

Short-answer text

\* هل تؤيد عمل المقابلة

☐

نعم

☐

لا

## Appendix 8: Invitation to Participate in a Research Interview

### تجارب النساء السعوديات في بيئة العمل الحر و انعكاساتها

**B I U ↻ ✕**

إلى الاخوة والاخوات الافاضل في وزارتي الموارد البشرية والتنمية الاجتماعية والهيئة العامة للنقل والعمالات في النقل الموجه ..... حفظكم الله

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

يقوم الباحث بإجراء دراسة بعنوان "تجارب النساء السعوديات في بيئة العمل الحر و انعكاساتها"، ويسعدني أن أتقدم إليكم بالشكر الجزيل مسبقاً على الوقت الذي ستخصصونه في الاستجابة على اسئلة هذه المقابلة، أرجو منكم التكرم بقبول الدعوه والمشاركة في نموذج التسجيل؛ لما لذلك من أثر بالغ في تحقيق أهداف الدراسة. علماً بأن إجاباتكم اثناء المقابلة ستكون موضع ثقة ولن تستخدم إلا لأغراض البحث العلمي فقط وبسرية تامة.

وتهدف هذه الدراسة على مستوى الافراد إلى تحقيق ما يلي:

1. فهم تجارب النساء العاملات كسائقات في خدمات النقل الموجه.
2. فهم دوافع المرأة السعودية للعمل في شركات خدمات النقل الموجه.
3. التعرف على العوائق والتحديات التي تواجهها السائقات السعوديات عند العمل في شركات خدمات النقل الموجه.

وعلى مستوى الحكومي:

1. فهم كيفية عمل الحكومة السعودية مع شركات النقل الموجه لتوظيف وتدريب وإدارة السائقات السعوديات.
2. استكشاف كيف يمكن لسياسات القوى العاملة الحالية أن تشجع المزيد من النساء على المساهمة في القوى العاملة من خلال العمل الحر.
3. استكشاف المشكلات التي تواجهها الحكومة السعودية عند العمل مع شركات النقل الموجه.
4. تحديد الفرص المستقبلية من قبل الحكومة السعودية لشركات النقل الموجه.
5. استكشاف كيف يمكن للحكومة السعودية تمكين المزيد من النساء للعمل في وظائف العمل الحر.

شكرا لكم على كرم الاستجابة

الباحث فارس خليل الصاعدي

إيميل:

[f.alsaedi@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:f.alsaedi@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

## Appendix 9: Semi-structured Research Interviews Guide

Individual Level	<i>Saudi Women Drivers</i>	
	<i>Experience:</i>	
	1. Tell me about your experiences of driving for ride-hailing services?	
	- What are your thoughts about working as a driver?	
	- How do you feel about working as a driver?	
	- What were the highlights of your experiences as a ride-hailing services driver?	
	o What do you enjoy about working as a driver?	
	- What were the most difficult experiences you have had as a ride-hailing services driver?	
	- Were there any problems that you faced when dealing with the passengers?	
	o How were these resolved?	
	- Were there any problems that you faced when dealing with ride-hailing services companies?	
	- How were these resolved?	
	- Has this affected your decision to continue working with them?	
	2. Why have you chosen to be a ride-hailing service driver?	
	- Did you feel like you have a choice about working as a driver?	
	- Do you think your decision was influenced by your family?	
	o Do you think your decision was influenced by work-life balance?	
	- Do you think your decision was influenced by finances? What about financial independence?	
	- Do you think your decision was influenced by the working hours?	
	- Do you think your decision was influenced by the changes in labour policy?	
	- Why have you not chosen other jobs?	
	<i>Divided labour:</i>	
	3. Do you have family and children to care for? Who takes care of them while you are working?	
	- Do you feel that working as a driver has affected your role as a mother/wife/carer? How has it been affected?	
	- Does your husband/family support your decision to work as a driver?	
	- What does your husband/family think about your work?	
	- Do you contribute financially to the family? What does your husband/family think about it? How do you feel about it?	
	<i>Socialisation:</i>	
	4. How has your upbringing affected your perspective of working as a female driver?	
	- How has social media affected your perspective of working as a driver?	
	<i>Cultural beliefs of gender roles:</i>	
	5. Do you feel that being a ride-hailing services driver is a career more suited to a male?	
	- In your social circle is it acceptable to be a female driver for ride-hailing services?	
	- Do you feel that as a woman you have limited job options?	
	- Do you feel that your decision to be a driver has been influenced by this?	
	- Can you explain how you would/have dealt with challenging situations with clients (e.g., cancellation, arguments, fees)	
	- Have you regretted any interaction with your client or with ride-hailing services?	
	- Was there a time when you had to be more aggressive with a client or with ride-hailing services?	
	<i>Closing</i>	
	6. What do you think would help you do your job better as a female driver?	
	- Is there anything else you would to add about your thoughts and experience as a female ride-hailing services driver?	

Governmental Level	<b><i>Government Officials and Ride-Hailing Representatives</i></b>
	<b><i>Resilience and community commitment:</i></b>
	1. What are the aims set by the government in relation to Saudi women drivers?
	- Do you think the aims and objectives set by the government were supported by female drivers in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?
	- How have various companies adapted or modified their actions/strategies to fit in better in KSA?
	- What are the difficulties of implementing strategies in KSA relating to female drivers?
	- What has the government done to meet the expectations of the female drivers?
	- Do you see a difference between the work and behaviours of your male and female drivers?
	<b><i>Indigenous leadership:</i></b>
	2. What has the government done to advocate for the female drivers in the companies?
	- Are there people in the government that represent the interests of female drivers?
	<b><i>Institutional rhetoric:</i></b>
	3. How is well do the ride-hailing service companies engage with the country's vision 2030 goal on increasing employment of females?
	- How have ride-haling services companies tried to engage with female drivers on their needs?
	- What strategies has the government planned/implemented to help meet the needs of the female drivers?
	- What has been done by the government to encourage more women drivers to join ride-hailing service companies? What has been done by the companies to encourage more women drivers to join ride-hailing service companies?
	- What are the policies/benefits in place to help women drivers?
	- What are the safety procedures in place to safeguard women?
	- Is there different treatment for male and female drivers
	<b><i>Closing</i></b>
	4. Is there anything else you would to add?
	- Final thoughts!

## Appendix 10: Visual Representation of Thematic Analysis

