
April 2022

COVID-19 and the (In) visibility of Gender in Media: Explorations from a Jordanian Perspective

Amani Al-Serhan
Center for Women's Studies, University of Jordan

Reem Q. Al Fayez
*Department of Computer Information System, King Abdullah II School of Information Technology Faculty,
The University of Jordan*

Safa Shweihat
chool of Basic Sciences and Humanities, German Jordanian University- Amman, Jordan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Al-Serhan, Amani; Al Fayez, Reem Q.; and Shweihat, Safa (2022). COVID-19 and the (In) visibility of Gender in Media: Explorations from a Jordanian Perspective. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 23(3), 25-40.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol23/iss3/3>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

COVID-19 and the (In) visibility of Gender in Media: Explorations from a Jordanian Perspective

By Amani Al-Serhan¹, Reem Q. Al Fayez², Safa Shweihat³

Abstract

Jordanian women have made significant contributions, and they continue to break down barriers, as the number of women in universities exceeds the number of men, and their numbers have increased in administrative positions, parliament, and the judiciary (World Economic forum 2018). However, despite their notable progress in various sectors, Jordanian media still fail to shed light on these contributions. This marginalization was particularly evident in Jordan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where media coverage focused mainly on male officials, branding them "True men in times of crisis" and failing to shed light on women's significant role in the frontlines of defense against the deadly virus. Drawing on data extracted from Twitter accounts of key Jordanian male and female figures and a close analysis of top television programs during the health crisis, this paper explores social media coverage on Jordanian male and female officials and official media interest in women as guests on popular television programs at the height of the Coronavirus outbreak in Jordan from March until July 2020. Findings reveal gendered bias in media coverage during this health crisis and that women resort to social media as alternative platforms for action.

Keywords: Women, Jordan, Media coverage, Global, Pandemic, Public discourse

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has surprised the world, affected economies, and put tremendous strain on healthcare systems. Response to this emerging crisis varied from imposing strict lockdown measures to gradual opening with social distancing. Considering the dire economic situation of Jordan, the country fared well at the beginning of the outbreak of the virus and its response to the crisis, according to various testimonials on world news outlets (Tadros 2020; Riedel 2020; Yunes 2020; Luck 2020A).

Several published research studies investigated the COVID-19 crisis response in Middle Eastern countries (Norell 2020; Sawaya 2020). Jordan is considered a young state in the region and is strategically located in the Middle East. Statistics about Jordan shown in Table 1 indicate the population, GPD, and GNI per capita. Jordan plays a vital role in hosting refugees, which increased the population over the years. According to the World Bank, 13% of Jordan's population is from Syrian refugees. Many turbulent events hit the MENA region during the Arab Spring, and

¹ Center for Women's Studies, University of Jordan- Amman, Jordan, 11942. alserhan.amani@ju.edu.jo.

² Department of Computer Information System, King Abdullah II School of Information Technology Faculty, The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan, 11942- r.alfayez@ju.edu.jo.

³ School of Basic Sciences and Humanities, German Jordanian University- Amman, Jordan, 11180- safa.shweihat@gu.edu.jo.

many of Jordan's neighboring countries are still struggling with internal conflicts. Despite the status of all its surrounding countries, Jordan stood still and managed to remain a peaceful and stable country in the MENA region (Zhang 2021).

Furthermore, Jordan plays a significant role in promoting cooperation and trade between its neighboring countries. Hence, the stability of Jordan is crucial regionally and globally. During the pandemic, the political stability of a country affected its readiness for managing the pandemic and its implications. As discussed in (Bizri 2021), neighboring countries of Jordan, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, suffer from political and economic turmoil that undoubtedly affected their healthcare systems and measures taken to manage the pandemic. On the contrary, Jordan's political stability helped implement efficient measures to handle the impact of the pandemic in its early stages. In fact, according to the IMF website⁴, Jordan's real GDP growth changed from -1.6 % in 2020 to 2% growth in 2021 and is expected to grow 3.3% in 2025, as indicated by the IMF Data Mapper.

Table 1: Important Statistics about Jordan (Year 2020)

Population	10,203,140
GDP	\$43.698 billion
GNI per capita	\$4,310

Source: World Bank data published in 2020

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, martial law was imposed in Jordan, and the National Centre for Crisis Management was the focal point of control, combining the efforts of the government and the Armed Forces in tackling this precarious situation. Due to the restrictions imposed on Jordan's economy as a response to Coronavirus, the GDP dropped by -1.6% in 2020, resulting in a noted recession. One major contributor to this drop in Jordan's economy is closing the border, as detailed in (MEI 2021). Under martial law, the Jordanian government closed land and air borders, which affected tourism and trade with neighboring countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. All business activities have been stalled for almost 6 months since June 2020. Such measures caused the Jordanian economy to deteriorate, as the case is for the economy worldwide.

Meanwhile, regular daily joint press conferences were held by the government and army officials. While public feelings of despair were projected towards the government for failing to tackle pressing issues such as poverty and unemployment, the COVID-19 crisis somewhat rebuilt people's trust in the government in the early months of responding to this crisis (March 2020-September 2020) (Kirchner 2020; Al-Salhi 2020; Al-Salhi and Abu Goush 2020). In September 2021, Jordan started to loosen its restrictions by returning to in-person learning and opening businesses in different areas after encouraging citizens to vaccinate through massive vaccination campaigns. The curve of the numbers of coronavirus cases varied over the past months. The current status quo of cases is detailed in Table 2.

⁴ <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/JOR>

Table 2: Jordan's Number of COVID-19 Cases and Vaccination Numbers Collected on (29/10/2021)⁵

Covid confirmed cases	858,342
Deaths	11,000
Doses Administered	7,440,887
People Fully Vaccinated	3,510,138
% of Population Fully Vaccinated	34.75%

Source: Johns Hopkins coronavirus resource center

According to “*Our World in Data* website,”⁶ managed by Oxford University, the share of fully vaccinated people in Jordan is not the highest among other countries in the region. For example, at the date of writing this article, the percentage of fully vaccinated people in Saudi Arabia is 61% and 88% in UAE, which is much higher than in Jordan. In contrast, other countries like Lebanon (23%), Egypt (11%), Iraq (8.7%), and Syria (4.4%) reported lower percentages than Jordan.

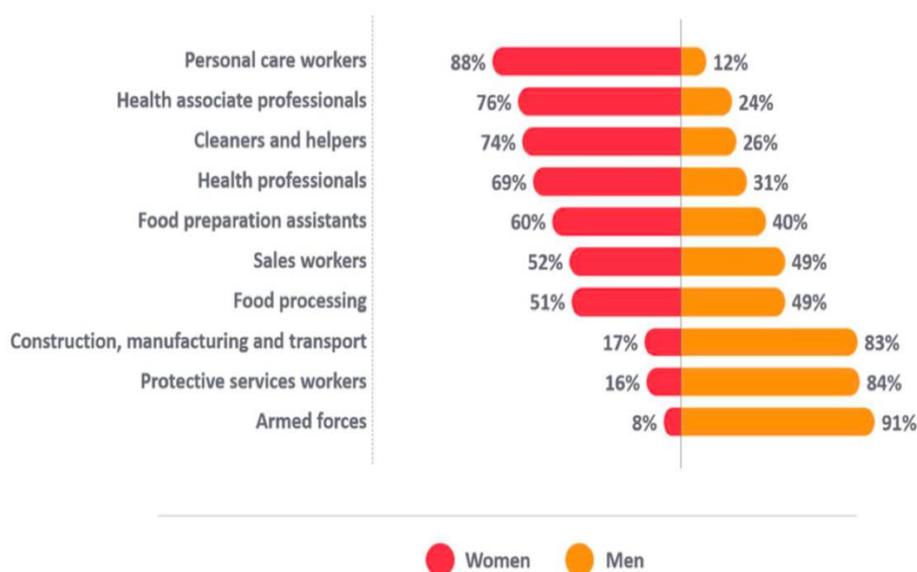
COVID-19 and Gendered Media Attention

During this pandemic, social media posts and interactions from Jordanians with media and news were massive. Media coverage of Jordan's efforts to confine the pandemic was fascinating. Faces of Health Minister Sa'ad Jaber and Minister of Media Affairs, and spokesperson of the government, Amjad Adaileh, have become household names with the whole nation tuning in to listen to their daily press conferences regarding the number of reported cases with the virus and new laws and regulations taking force. The public grew infatuated with the health minister, praising him as "The man of the situation" (Luck, 2020B). Images of Jaber and excerpts of poetry and songs praising his efforts were commonly circulated on social media platforms. National songs were also being circulated, lauding the role of the Armed Forces in handling the crisis so well.

However, careful observation of public discourse on the COVID-19 crisis will highlight the lack of media presence of Jordanian women and interest in major challenges they face, despite them shouldering onerous burdens during this crisis. In most parts of the world, women are responsible for carrying out what is deemed 'invisible work' (Danielsson & Eriksson, 2020; Hatton, 2017) in the domestic sphere and are thus at greater risk during a global pandemic. Data from 104 countries reveal that 67% of healthcare workers are women (Boniol et al. 2019), and they are potentially overloaded with long working hours and stress. Nonetheless, women nurses or doctors were rarely interviewed in popular T.V. shows, for example. Figure 1 highlights the global gender divide across frontline industries.

⁵ <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/jordan>

⁶ <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>

Figure 1: Gender Divide across Frontline Industries

Source: “Gender dimensions of the Covid-19 pandemic”, World Bank Group, Policy Note, April 26, 2020

In many societies, women were the ones who had to bear the considerable responsibility of caring for their family members during the pandemic. These tasks are often taken for granted and unpaid, further undermining women's economic activities and earnings (Wenham, Smith, & Morgan 2020). Given the patriarchal nature of Jordanian society and the unequal division of labor that persists, women were the underground heroes bearing the burden of household chores, homeschooling their children, caring for the elderly and the ill, and attending to their family's needs (UNWomen 2020; Khamis & Campbell 2020). These chores exacerbated the situation for working mothers who were overloaded with many responsibilities, particularly those working in the health sector (Refsing 2020). The percentage of Jordanian women working in the health sector is 44% (Goldstein and Braunschweiger, 2020). For instance, Nurse Samah Tanaib reportedly stayed for 28 days on duty at Prince Hamza Hospital before going home to see her four children (Roya News 2020). Jordanian women in various sectors, particularly the medical and educational ones, demonstrated exceptional efforts to cope with the global pandemic. As Secretary-General of the

Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), Salma Nims states, "the presence of women in the media is not just about representation, but also about changing the narrative" (The Jordan Times, June 30, 2020).

The relative invisibility of women in media is a global phenomenon. In a study titled, "The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News: A special report on women's underrepresentation in news media", analysis of news content from 11,913 publications and 1.9 million stories in six countries (India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, UK, and the U.S.) revealed: "the political absence of women in COVID-19-related decision-making processes" (Kassova 2020). Moreover, when women are given media coverage during COVID, they are "rarely portrayed as authoritative experts or as empowered individuals but more frequently as sources of personal opinion or as victims/people affected by the disease" (Kassova 2020). The media thus ignored them as "authoritative voices." Furthermore, "women constituted 19% of experts while men constituted 77% in the 175 most highly ranked COVID-19 articles across the six countries" (Kassova 2020). Nonetheless, media coverage continues to emphasize that men experts deem women invisible.

In Jordan, the relative invisibility of women in media during the COVID-19 crisis was not only limited to the low numbers of women being hosted and the underestimation of women's role in times of crisis but also extends to the way many pressing issues relating to women were ignored. The main one is childcare. On April 30, 2020, and in the government's bid to relax lockdown measures, it was announced that the public sector would resume work with a limited number of human capacity. However, the issue of working mothers with children was not raised as a priority. It was only after civil society organizations such as Sadaqa and Sisterhood Is Global Institute-Jordan (SIGI), among others, began to address this issue on social media platforms that public debate on childcare and obstacles facing working mothers began to surface (Sadaqa 2020). Nims noted that "as exemplified by domestic violence cases and female teachers being deprived of their rights in private schools, women have been affected by the pandemic's implications by *double the effect on men, which requires a shift in the narrative*" (Jordan Times, June 30, 2020). In times of uncertainty and global crisis, it is of utmost importance to shed light on the roles and contributions of women as significant partners and active agents of change.

While there has been a slight shift in narrative focusing on women's significant role in managing the crisis, much more effort is needed to give them the media attention they deserve. For instance, The American Forbes Business Journal published an article entitled "What is the common denominator among the best countries in response to the Coronavirus crisis?" (BBC 2020). The article highlights the success of female leadership in seven countries during the global pandemic (BBC 2020). Additionally, more literature was pointing to the significant role of women in managing this crisis on a global scale (Siobhan and O'Grady 2020; Henley, Jon and Roy 2020; Taub 2020; Phillips 2020; Hassan and O'Grady 2020; Carey 2020) and the significance of a feminist media coverage geared towards the gendered dimension of a health crisis (Salih 2020).

In Jordan, timid efforts were made in highlighting women's role during the global pandemic. In a digital media forum aiming to promote gender-sensitive media reporting, Minister of Media Amjad Al-Adayleh stressed the role of Jordanian women in various fields in facing the global pandemic alongside men (Petra 2020). In attempts to fill the existing gaps in the literature, this paper, therefore, examines the invisibility of women in public discourse during the COVID-19 crisis by significant media outlets and Jordanians' interaction with the social media platforms of male and female government officials.

Methodology

Amid the global pandemic, Jordanians' reliance on social media for following major media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram witnessed a stark increase. A recently published study on Jordanians' use of social media platforms (Saadeh 2021) highlights that almost 85% of the population sample had shown an increase in the usage of mobile phones for social media and watching movies on online platforms like Netflix and YouTube. Twitter was also becoming a popular social media platform with a resource pointing out that 400 thousand Jordanians are active daily users of this platform (Alghad 2017). Furthermore, statistics collected by specialized companies showed an increase in social media usage in one year, as detailed in Table 3.

Despite the popularity of Facebook and YouTube, the social media data collection process was focused on Twitter as it is considered one of the popular social media platforms with a rich dataset to use. The advanced features that enable systematic analyses of datasets are not available for other social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube. Twitter4J (2014) is one of the Twitter streaming API (2020) which allows access to publicly available data via tracking specific user profiles or searching for hashtags during a specified time frame. Jordanian politicians and media channels were very active on social media during the crisis. Hence, the Twitter4J library was configured to collect data from retrieving the profiles of distinguished public figures in the Jordanian government and media. Data sets retrieved from social media sites provide a valuable indication of the invisibility of gender diversity during the COVID-19 pandemic in Jordan.

Table 3: Jordanian Users of Social Media Platforms during (Feb of 2020 until Feb of 2021)

Date	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	Reddit	Tumblr	Vkontakte
2020-02	62.11	10.7	14.44	2.91	8.9	0.37	0.27	0.12	0.15
2020-03	64.99	8.31	14.29	3.1	8.54	0.28	0.23	0.12	0.12
2020-04	60.15	10.46	15.48	4.2	8.73	0.36	0.35	0.12	0.12
2020-05	72.02	13.49	6.2	5.58	1.48	0.5	0.39	0.16	0.14
2020-06	74	12.11	6.5	4.99	1.2	0.53	0.37	0.18	0.1
2020-07	74.17	11.68	6.78	4.86	1.35	0.44	0.37	0.2	0.1
2020-08	75.15	11.51	6.41	3.62	1.42	0.45	0.31	0.23	0.87
2020-09	74.59	11.58	6.88	3.99	1.58	0.54	0.34	0.23	0.23
2020-10	71.85	12.31	8.65	4.47	1.53	0.43	0.36	0.25	0.13
2020-11	68.72	12.11	11.68	4.22	2.01	0.41	0.38	0.3	0.13
2020-12	68.39	13.61	10.25	4.27	2.25	0.33	0.44	0.29	0.11

2021-01	69.8	11.88	9.54	4.9	2.56	0.36	0.53	0.29	0.11
2021-02	71.92	9.94	8.65	5.06	2.93	0.36	0.57	0.39	0.12

Source: Statcounter GlobalStats, Social Media Stats Worldwide. Feb 2020-Feb 2021

Despite the low number of women representatives in the Jordanian governmental cabinet headed by Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz (during the outbreak of the global pandemic) (3 out of 25 ministers), we extracted tweets from the profiles of 4 ministers (two men and two women) who had a significant role in handling the crisis and who had the most appearances during the first few months of the outbreak of the virus in Jordan. These were Minister of Health (man), Minister of Media Affairs (man), Minister of Tourism and Antiquities (woman), and Minister of Energy and Mineral Resource (woman). Though the Minister of Health had the most important role, other officials handled financial repercussions on tourism and energy, critically affected sectors by the pandemic. Female presenters of official media channels and popular programs are very few compared to men in Jordan. Popular daily television talk shows discussing pressing social and political issues remain dominated by male hosts, except for the weekly talk show *60 Minutes*, hosted by presenter Abeer Al-Zaben. The inadequate presence of Jordanian women in official media explains our choice to investigate presenter Amer Al-Rjoub, host of the daily evening program, *The Voice of the Kingdom*. In this show, guests discuss the impact of the global pandemic on vital sectors. This show was broadcast on Al-Mamlaka Channel and ranked first in viewership during the health crisis (Al-Rai 2020).

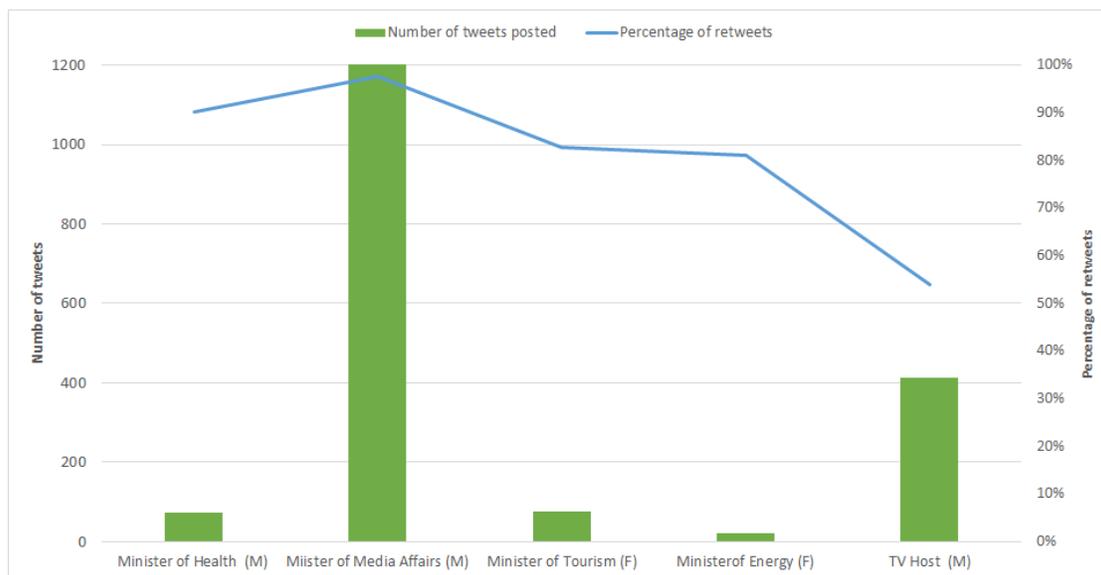
As one of the main aims of the article is to investigate social media interaction with officials of both genders at the height of COVID-19, tweets from the officials' Twitter accounts were extracted and filtered to include data from March 2020 until the end of June 2020. All collected data considered tweets only posted by their profiles and excluded any retweets posted on these profiles. The COVID-19 crisis started in Jordan in March 2020; hence, the focus is on this period.

Additionally, we investigated the gendered dimension of the television appearance of Jordanian women on major talk show programs. The programs that were chosen were among the most popular daily programs. They both air on national television networks: *The Voice of the Kingdom* that airs daily at 8:00 P.M on Al-Mamlaka Channel, and the second is *The Pulse of the Nation*, which airs daily at 8:30 P.M on Roya Channel (Alaraby 2019). Both “TV Shows” host government officials and leading public figures to discuss pressing issues resulting from the global pandemic and its impact on Jordanians on various levels.

Findings and Discussion

Interaction with Male Officials Exceeds Female Ones

The data collected from five user profiles participating in this study (4 ministers and the T.V. host) are detailed in Figure 2.

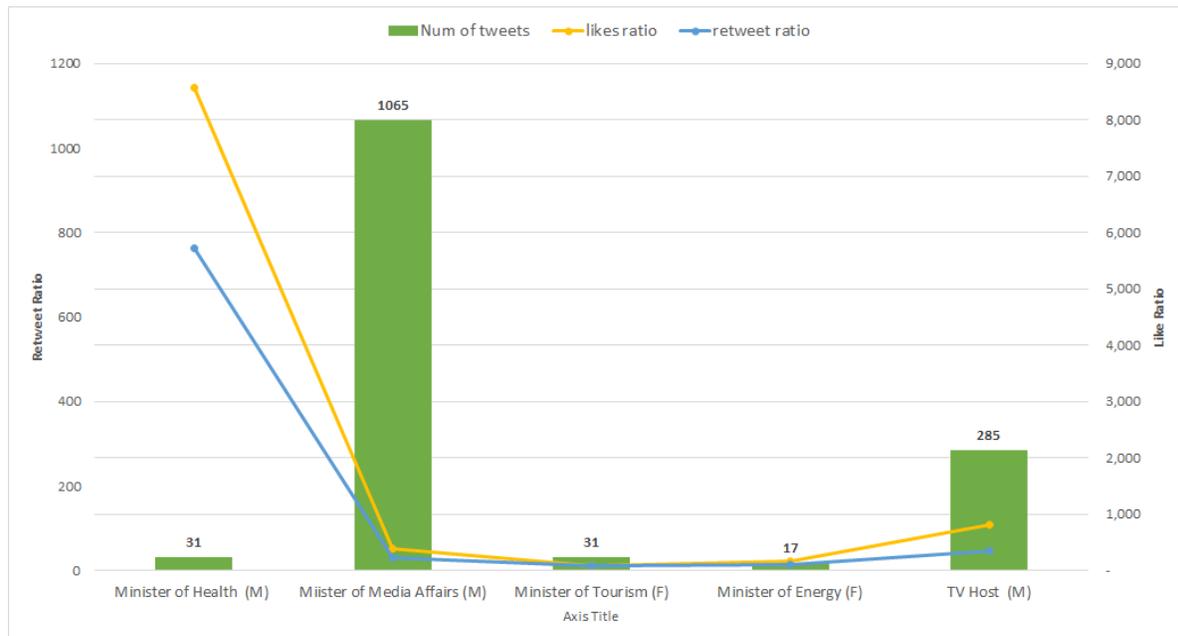
Figure 2: Twitter Posts Collected between March-June 2020

Source: An original figure developed by the authors after analyzing the Twitter data collected using Twitter4J

Figure 3 details the tweets and the percentage of retweets for all five profiles studied between March and June 2020. The Minister of Media Affairs is the government's spokesperson and has the largest number of tweets posted on his profile among the group. The Jordanian government relied heavily on social media to distribute news and assert decisions made by the government. The T.V. host ranked second in the number of tweets, as his show gained popularity during the pandemic after touching on critical issues such as the status of online learning, medical procedures to contain the virus, and the status of workers in the informal economy, to name a few. While other officials had a low number of tweets, public interaction by the retweet action tends to share official news from governmental figures rather than from the tweets of the T.V. host. This aligns with the government's actions to use social media as a tool for disseminating news and decisions through the personal channels of its ministers.

The peak period of the COVID-19 crisis was between March 15 and May 30. Figure 3 illustrates the number of tweets posted by the same user profiles and the favoring and retweeting engagement from the public towards these officials and their posts. The results of this rapid Twitter analysis do not come as a surprise. Whether liking or retweeting a post or hosting guests, male officials and public figures remain at the forefront of media attention, T.V. programs, and interaction by the Jordanian public despite the similarity in the number of posts posted by the users. The figure also indicates the substantial public interaction with the Minister of Health compared to the interactions with the Minister of Media Affairs compared to the number of tweets published by their accounts. While the Health Minister and Minister of Tourism have the same number of tweets (as shown in Figure 3), a stark difference exists in favoring their tweets to a total of 265,639 compared to 2,719 likes, respectively. The figure highlights the popularity of the Minister of Health based on the public engagement with his tweet in a short period.

Figure 3: The Interaction Ratio to the Number of Tweets Posted by the Official at the Peak of the COVID-19 Crisis in Jordan (15/March – 30/May)



Source: An original figure developed by the authors after analyzing the Twitter data collected using Twitter4J

Gendered Media Coverage

It is fascinating to observe how media coverage of Jordanian women was sporadic. Occasionally, the women ministers in the government such as Minister of Social Affairs, Basma Ishaqat, Minister of Tourism, Majd Shwaikah, and Minister of Energy, Hala Zawati would appear on televised programs and share their plans to resurrect these sectors and discuss ongoing efforts to compensate those that were affected most by the crisis. Nonetheless, they did not receive the same attention and appraisal as their male colleagues and were a subject of negative public criticism on multiple occasions. For instance, Minister Shwaikah's statements about reviving domestic tourism through offering low airline tickets to Aqaba were met with public scrutiny. People on social media complained that tourism in these dire circumstances had become a luxury that many Jordanians could not afford.

From the onset of the global pandemic, Jordanian media has been fixated on the role of male officials to combat the current crisis. Whether this was done intentionally or not, such gendered media coverage served to downplay the role that women had to bear in flattening the curve of the spread of the virus. Male officials, such as the Minister of Health and spokesperson of the Jordanian government, were given center stage to discuss the current situation, and their statements were met with significant public interaction. The same applies to the popular T.V. presenter of *The Voice of the Kingdom* Program, Amer Al-Rjoub. Fully acknowledging the prevalence of their official post, vis a vis the health crisis, female officials were not met with the same recognition and interaction as their male counterparts.

Table 4: The Average of Male vs. Female Guests Appearing on Most-watched T.V. Programs in Jordan (March – June of 2020 average numbers)

	Male guests (average per month)	Female guests (average per month)
Program (1): <i>The Voice of the Kingdom</i>	35	2
Program (2): <i>Pulse of the Nation</i>	34	3

Source: Direct observation (of authors) based on recorded episodes of these programs on YouTube.

Biased media coverage was also visible in the number of women guests appearing on major TV shows during the crisis. As shown in Table 4, a significant gap exists between the numbers of women guests versus men. Low media coverage of women serves as a good indicator reflecting and exposing existing patriarchal attitudes and structured gendered inequality of Jordanian society. Despite the high number of Jordanian women experts in health, educational, economic, social, and political domains, their absence from key media dialogues instigates the gendered demarcation of public spaces. Many people, including the U.K. Ambassador to Jordan, noted that the coverage was biased since it largely praised seven male ministers while neglecting the efforts of many women in the health care system (Jordan Times, June 30, 2020).

In this context, it is essential to note that the sole issue is not just the mere low number of female guests and social media interaction compared to male guests; it extends far beyond this. Although Jordanian women are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, little media attention is given to the many growing challenges they endured during the global pandemic. These include social division of labor, unpaid domestic and care work, gender-based violence, fluctuating laws regarding childcare facilities, and unemployment.

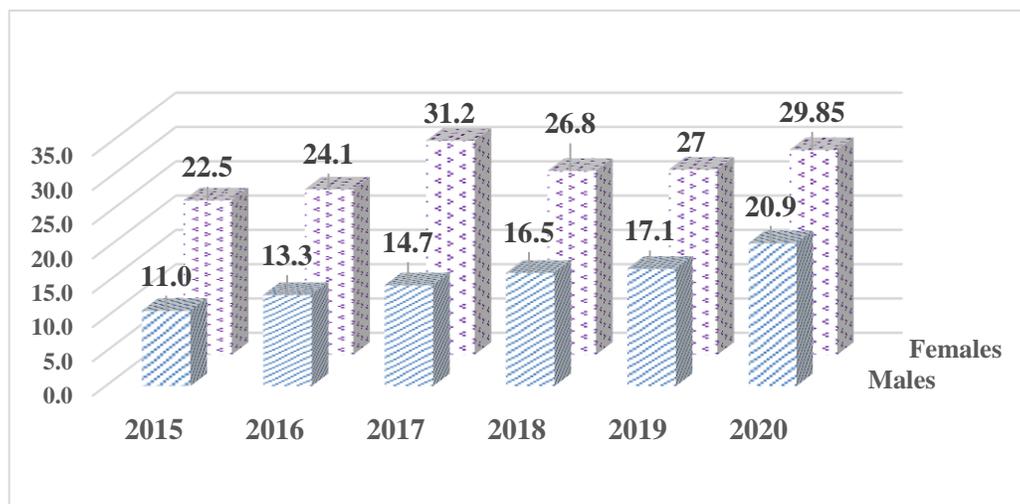
Recent years have witnessed successive economic crises that affected Jordanian society and contributed to the high rates of poverty and unemployment and the low standard of living for many segments of society. The unemployment rate in the Kingdom during the first quarter of the year (2021) was 25.0%. During 2020, the unemployment rate for males reached 24.2% compared to 28.5% for females. The unemployment rate for males increased by 6.1 percentage points and rose for females by 4.2 percentage points in the first quarter of the year (2020) (Department of Statistics 2021). The official Jordanian statistics recorded that the unemployment rate of Jordanian women increased during the fourth quarter of the year (2020), reaching 32.8% compared to males (22.6%) (Department of Statistics). While these disappointing figures are attributed to several factors predating the health crisis, they were further exacerbated due to the global pandemic.

Figure 4: Economic Participation Rates in Jordan for Selected Years by Gender

Source:

Department of Statistics, Jordan in numbers for the years 2015-2020

Based on this figure, it is clear that there is a negative trend in the contribution of women to economic life during the period 2015-2020. Statistics indicate that the unemployment rate in Jordan during the years 2015-2020 increased for both genders. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Unemployment Rates in Jordan for Selected Years by Sex

Source: Department of Statistics, Jordan in numbers for the years 2015-2020

The economic participation rate for women reached 14.7% compared to 53.7% for males for the year 2020 (Department of Statistics, 2020). Unfortunately, these statistics are considered the lowest on a global scale as the global percentage of women's economic participation rate is 38.87% for the same year. 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, which was anticipated to be a critical year in the long road to gender equality. However, with the advent of the global pandemic, the modest gains made in past decades were now at risk. The health crisis deepened pre-existing inequalities and exposed the vulnerabilities of social, political, and economic systems that exacerbated the pandemic's impacts on women in particular (United Nations 2020). The pandemic and its economic repercussions are counterproductive to global gender equality. Women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men's jobs. Women

comprise 39% of global employment but represent 54% of total job losses. One of the reasons for this more significant impact on women is that the virus dramatically increases the burden of unpaid care, which women disproportionately bear. This means, among other factors, that women's employment is declining faster than average, even because women and men work in different sectors (Mahajan et al. 2020).

In Jordan, the economy took a significant hit. Unemployment among males during the third quarter of 2020 reached 21.2% compared to 33.6% for females. The unemployment rate for males increased by 4.1 points, and for females, it increased by 6.1 points compared to the third quarter of 2019 (Department of Statistics, 2020). Moreover, Jordan is ranked amongst the worst countries in terms of the gender gap, says Abla Amawi, General Secretary of Higher Population Council, in a televised interview on the weekly show *60 Minutes* (Khaberni 2021). Based on the global gender index, Jordan ranked 138 out of 149 countries for 2018 (World Economic Forum 2018). From all these statistics, it is clear that Jordanian women remain the most vulnerable in times of crisis. It is unfortunate that despite all their serious economic, social, and medical insecurities during the global pandemic, little to no media attention was geared towards their valid concerns.

Social Media as an Alternative Platform for Action

In response to the marginalization of women in the Jordanian media, several affluent Jordanian women decided to shed light on the significance of women's social, economic, and medical contributions during the crisis to affirm their presence and roles in fighting Coronavirus. For instance, the prolific NGO SIGI (Sisterhood Is Global Institute-Jordan), headed by Asma Khader, former minister and spokesperson of the Jordanian government, has hosted weekly webinars to illuminate the public opinion on pressing issues related to women. These include childcare, gender-based violence, and women's political activism during COVID-19, to name but a few. An Eye on Women is among their programs, where women from various backgrounds are invited to public discussions streamed live through their Facebook page.

On May 8, 2020, the Ammon website (a well-known online news site) published an article entitled "Women political leaders affirming their pride in the country's effort to manage the Corona crisis." This article was based on a live online webinar session via Zoom entitled "Political Parties and the Corona Crisis: A Women's Vision" organized by SIGI. In this dialogue, various female parliamentarians expressed pride in the efforts of the government, military, security, health services, and the National Center for Crisis Management for their excellent handling of the Corona pandemic crisis. In addition to health measures to contain the virus and prevent its spread from protecting the health of citizens, Director of SIGI, Asma Khader, stated, "The purpose of the dialogue is to take lessons from the experience of the Corona crisis, and link it with the political participation of women and discuss the roles that political parties can play in the confrontation in the current and future stage" (Ammon News, 2020).

Similarly, Sadaqa (another pioneering NGO advocating favorable conditions for working mothers) hosted several virtual seminars that were streamed live on their social media platforms to discuss the issue of childcare amid a partial return to work during a global pandemic. They successfully launched a social media campaign called "*Electronic storm: the voice of female workers*" and met with senior governmental officials, thus placing the issue of childcare at the forefront of public media debate. On June 30, 2020, a digital media forum entitled: *Women in media and gender-sensitive reporting during the Covid-19 pandemic* was held. Jordanian National Commission organized this forum for Women (a quasi-governmental organization functioning as the umbrella for all NGOs working on women) and UN-Women, hosted several female presenters

and reporters, and discussed current challenges facing Jordanian women and ways to promote more female visibility in Jordanian media (Petra News 2020).

Conclusion

The relative absence of Jordanian women in the media during the global pandemic could be read as part of the global discourse on women's role in times of crisis. There was an apparent media deficiency in highlighting the contribution of women in facing Coronavirus, which was characterized by the three significant phenomena. The first is the low levels of interactions with posts of female public officials compared to men. The second is the disproportionate number of women appearing as guests on two of the most popular television programs in Jordan, and the last is the lack of official media attention to issues and challenges about women during the health crisis. Moreover, the marginalization of women in Jordan media is part of broader issues. The World Bank 2020 report on gender equality shows that the participation of Jordanian women in the labor market is less than 15%, the unemployment rate of women is 25%, that is, twice the unemployment of men, and the gender gap between Jordanian men and women in the private sector wages for occupations, educational attainment, and similar experience is 17%. Culturally and socially, stereotypical images of women as caregivers mainly confined to the domestic sphere remain dominant. Despite women's noticeable absence in official media outlets during the Coronavirus crisis, they compensated for this absence on social media platforms. In a country like Jordan, which is progressive, this absence is alarming and merits serious attention.

References

- Ammon News. May (2020). "Women political leaders affirm their pride in the efforts to manage the Corona crisis." Accessed June 28, 2020. <https://www.ammonnews.net/index.php?page=article&id=535419>.
- Al-Araby (2019). "Talk Shows in Jordan: various options and strong competition." (September 13, 2019). Accessed November 8, 2021. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/>.
- Al-Salhi N. and Abu Goush T. (2020). Ipsos' Jordanian Consumer Sentiment Index Q2 2020. Accessed November 7, 2021. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-jo/ipsos-jordanian-consumer-sentiment-index-q2-2020>.
- Al-Salhi N. (2020). "A Growing Pandemic; Analyzing Jordanians' Online Conversations on Covid-19." Accessed November 7, 2021. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-jo/growing-pandemic-analyzing-jordanians-online-conversations-covid-19>.
- BBC News, April (2020). "Corona Virus: Why have other countries succeeded and failed to address the pandemic?" Accessed June 27, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/amp/interactivity-52346836>.
- Bizri, N. A., Alam, W., Mobayed, T., Tamim, H., Makki, M., & Mushrrafieh, U. (2021). "COVID-19 in conflict region: the Arab Levant response." *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1-13.
- Boniol, M., McIsaac, M., Xu, L., Wuliji, T., Diallo, K., & Campbell, J. (2019). "Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries." (p. 8). World Health Organization.
- Carey, A. (2020). Coronavirus: Nations with female leaders winning COVID-19 battle. *News.com.au*. Accessed November 9, 2021. <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/leaders/coronavirus-nations-with-female-leaders-winning-covid19-battle/news-story/5742eda471cf8abd4fca2530865986d9>.
- Danielsson, E., & Eriksson, K. (2020). "Women's invisible work in disaster contexts: Gender norms in speech on women's work after a forest fire in Sweden." *Disasters*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12464>.
- Goldstein, E. and Braunschweiger, A. (2020), "When Health Care Is Decimated By War: COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa," *Human Rights Watch*, April 16, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/16/when-health-care-decimated-war-covid-19-middle-east-and-north-africa>.
- Hassan, S., and O'Grady, J. (2020). "Female World Leaders Hailed as Voices of Reason amid the Coronavirus Chaos." *Washington Post*, April 21. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/20/female-world-leaders-hailed-voices-reason-amidcoronavirus-chaos>.
- Hatton, E. (2017). "Mechanisms of invisibility: Rethinking the concept of invisible work." *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(2), 336–351.
- Henley, J. and Eleanor Ainge Roy. (2020). "Are female leaders more successful at managing the coronavirus crisis?" *The Guardian*, April 25. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/25/why-do-female-leaders-seem-tobe-more-successful-at-managing-the-coronavirus-crisis>.
- International Monetary Fund. November (2021). IMF Data Mapper, Real GDP Growth indicator. Accessed November 7, 2020. <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/JOR#countrydata>.
- Kassova, L. (2020). "The missing perspectives of women in news." *Political Communication (Issue November)*. <https://www.iwvf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020.11>.

- Khaberni (2021). "Jordan is the second worst country in relation to global gender gap." (November 5, 2021). Accessed November 9, 2021. <https://www.khaberni.com/news/-463558>.
- Khamis, S., & Campbell, E. (2020). "Info-deficiency in an infodemic: the gender digital gap, Arab women and the Covid-19 pandemic." *Arab Media and Society*, 1-12.
- Kirchner, L., March (2020). "Jordan during Times of Corona: Divided Between Trust and Distress." Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Accessed 26th June 2020. <https://ps.boell.org/en/2020/03/31/jordan-during-times-corona-divided-between-trust-and-distress>.
- Luck, T. April (2020A). "How Jordan crushed the curve and halted Coronavirus in its tracks." *The National*. Accessed June 27, 2020. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/how-jordan-crushed-the-curve-and-halted-coronavirus-in-its-tracks-1.1013228>.
- Luck, T. April (2020B). "From healing hearts to stealing hearts: Jordan's 'Dr. Fauci'" *The Christian Science Monitor*, accessed June 28, 2020. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2020/0415/From-healing-hearts-to-stealing-hearts-Jordan-s-Dr.-Fauci>.
- Mahajan, D., White, O., Madgavkar, A., & Krishnan, M. (2020). "Do not let the pandemic set back gender equality." *Harvard Business Review*, 16.
- MEI. August (2020). "Jordan's rising economic challenges in the time of COVID-19." Accessed November 8, 2021. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/jordans-rising-economic-challenges-time-covid-19>.
- Norell, M. (2020). "The Coronavirus in the MENA region: Enhancing turbulence or mitigating conflicts?" *European View*, 19(2), 206–211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1781685820963334>.
- Petra News, June (2020). "Adaileh: Jordanian women in media have made significant contributions to the media scene during the Corona pandemic." Accessed June 28, 2020. https://petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=50506&lang=ar&name=local_news.
- Phillips, T. (2020). "Women are the stronger sex in this crisis." *The Times*, May 18. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/women-are-the-stronger-sex-in-thiscrisis-zrl9gxcjm>.
- Refsing, N. (2020). 'Media, Remember Gender in Your COVID-19 Coverage' (*International Media Support*, March 26, 2020). Accessed November 9, 2020. <https://www.mediasupport.org/news/media-remember-gender-in-your-covid-19-coverage/>.
- Riedel, B. April (2020). "ORDER FROM CHAOS: Jordan's unique coronavirus challenge." Accessed June 27, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/16/jordans-unique-coronavirus-challenge/>.
- Roya News, May (2020). "Samah: a nurse returned to her home after 28 days of continuous work in the isolation department in a Jordanian hospital" (video). *Roya news T.V.* accessed June 28, 2020. <https://royanews.tv/news/213818>.
- Saadah, H., Al Fayez, R. Q., Al Refaei, A., Shewaikani, N., Khawaldah, H., Abu-Shanab, S., & Al-Hussaini, M. (2021). "Smartphone Use Among University Students During COVID-19 Quarantine: An Ethical Trigger." *Frontiers in public health*, 9, 600134. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.600134>.
- Sadaqa: towards a women-friendly work environment. April (2020). "The first dialogue on the nurseries sector and the rights of caregivers in light of the challenges of the Corona crisis." Facebook. <https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=158983745457490>.

- Salih, I. (2020). "Corona: Why has feminist press become a necessity." Accessed November 9, 2021. <http://bitly.ws/jjtk>.
- Sawaya, T., Ballouz, T., Zaraket, H., & Rizk, N. (2020). "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the Middle East: a call for a unified response." *Frontiers in public health*, 8, 209.
- Siobhan, H. and O'Grady, J. (2020). "Female world leaders hailed as voices of reason amid the coronavirus chaos." *The Washington Post*, April 21. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/20/female-world-leaders-hailed-voices-reason-amid-coronavirus-chaos/>.
- Tadros, A. April (2020). "Drastic, early action seems to keep a lid on Jordan's COVID-19 outbreak." *CBS news*. Accessed June 20, 2020. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-in-jordan-seemingly-kept-in-check-by-drastic-early-lockdown-measures/>.
- Taub, A. (2020). "Why Are Nations Led by Women Doing Better?" *The New York Times*, May 15. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/world/coronavirus-womenleaders.html>.
- The Jordan Times, (2020). "Media forum sheds light on women's achievements during pandemic" by Maram Kayed. June 30, 2020.
- Twitter4J. (2014). Java library for the Twitter API. <http://twitter4j.org/en/>
- Twitter API. (2020). Twitter. <https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs>
- UNWomen. March (2020). "Covid-19 and gender: immediate recommendations for planning and response in Jordan." Accessed June 26, 2020. <https://jordan.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/covid19-and-gender-in-jordan>.
- Wenham, C., Smith, J., & Morgan, R. (2020). "COVID-19: The gendered impacts of the outbreak." *The Lancet*, 395(10227), 846–848.
- World Economic Forum. (2018). *Global Gender Gap Report*. Accessed November 9, 2021. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/data-explorer/#economy=JOR>
- Younes, A. April (2020). "How Jordan is Flattening its Covid-19 Curve." *Aljazeera* accessed 29 June 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/jordan-flattening-covid-19-curve-200422112212466.html>.
- Zhang, Yuan (2021). "A Nation-Building Analysis of Jordan's Response to Pandemic with the Perspective of Political Integration". *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 15:1, 66-83, DOI: 10.1080/25765949.2021.1898814 <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats#monthly-202002-202102>.