Legal Protection of Personal Information and Legislative Regulation for Accessibility and Accessibility of Open Data Online in Higher Education Institutions in the Arab Systems Saudi Arabia as a Model Efforts and Challenges

Ola Ahmed Jaber Abdullah

Gulf colleges -Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

In our current era, the most precious thing in the world is (information). Personal space begins with an individual's information and personal and social data, and the secrets of nations and governments consist of the data and information they possess. Even more alarming is that the latest forms of warfare are information breaches of the secrets and data of countries. In today's world, information or data is the greatest aspect that requires our attention in scientific research, protection, and stringent oversight, along with all means of organization and support, as it serves as the main driving force for everything in the world. Protecting personal information for individuals, institutions, governments, and nations is one of the most complex issues in the scientific, technical, and legal fields, which is what this study focuses on while also addressing related aspects of the right to access information.

When information is mixed with its previous importance, as mentioned in higher educational institutions and scientific research centers, the matter becomes more serious and significant. Indeed, the protection of personal information, especially scientific information and data, can become one of the crucial secrets for individuals, institutions, or even the state itself. On the other hand, the right to access information and its availability, according to its degree of privacy, is extremely important in today's era, as the world has become, as we say, an 'open society.' This is facilitated by social media, internet networks, and digital space, which has made obtaining information easy with just the press of a button or a touch of a screen. Thus, we will delve into this complex file and explore the extent to which countries, specifically Arab countries, have been able to effectively enable the enjoyment of the right to access information, as well as the possible approaches to remedy failures and overcome obstacles preventing the development of information access systems. We will also present a significantly advanced Arab model in a short period in the field of information protection on the one hand and its availability on the other, represented by the systems of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: information protection - access rights - availability - information security - digitization - digital space - open data

The problem of research:

The problem of research lies in the problems facing the protection of information in Arab systems and the legislative challenges that still stand in the way of protecting information, and on the other hand we explore together whether there is regulation of the extent of access to information or its availability, and finally we try to search for whether there is a legal balance between the protection of information and the availability and accessibility of information in Arab systems, specifically within higher educational institutions

The importance of research:

The importance of research lies in entering into a thorny world that the whole world seeks from protecting information and ensuring that it is not infringed, and on the other hand, to the idea of easy access to scientific information, especially in higher education institutions and how to organize this legislatively, and in practice the res

earch addresses the most important reasons for the lack of ease of access to information in the Arab world and the most important obstacles to which it is exposed and what are the proposed solutions to overcome this with reference to the model of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in this.

Scope of research:

The scope of research is limited to Arab systems, information protection legislation on the one hand, and policies regulating data availability and accessibility in the Arab countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Previous studies:

Several previous studies dealt with some of the Arab experiences in the field of freedom of information, including:

1.Enezi, Saad (2021) Legal Regulation of the Right to Access Administrative Information and Documents. Journal of the Kuwait International College of Law, 3 (35)

These focused primarily on comparing the legislative and regulatory frameworks for attempts to embody the right to access information against international freedom of information standards, and that simply enacting laws on freedom of access to information promises to stimulate administrative development and correct the relationship between users and management.

2. Karimi, (2018) The right to access information through the rules of international law, within: political thought. Questions and Issues in the Orbits of Freedom, Reform and the Constitution. Rabat: Publications of the Moroccan Journal of Public Policy. f. 167-168

Another study concluded by acknowledging the failure of Arab legislation to match security and human rights requirements as a result of the exaggerated provision of unjustified exceptions to the extent that the right to information is almost emptied of its real content.

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 NizalMusaid, Farhan (2017). The right to information in Jordanian legislation. Journal of Legal Sciences, 32(2), pp. 307

And while other legislation continues to make freedom of information merely an exception to the confidentiality rule, with vague formal and objective requirements that have significantly narrowed the scope of the use of this constitutional right.

4.Arafa, Mohammed (2020) Dreams without illusions: bureaucratic hindrance, administrative corruption and the future of democracy in the Arab region. Journal of Arab Politics, 42.

In terms of actual impact, the study focused on analyzing the political dividend of public data exposure by expanding freedoms of expression and participation. The higher the indicators of transparency and access to information, the more citizens will accept government policies and the higher the indicators of satisfaction with the performance of political and administrative institutions.

5.Abdelkader Mbappe, Nermin (2016). The role of international, regional and national human rights organizations in supporting the freedom of information in light of the trends of building knowledge societies. Journal of Library and Information Science, 16.

While some focused on tracking the implementation of a participatory approach in designing information access systems to make them more effective, the challenge of aligning the national legislative framework for freedom of information with international standards was an opportunity to bridge the gap between public authorities and civil society organizations in diagnosing public problems and developing appropriate solutions to them.

6. AlRashidi, Khaled and Clive, Walker (2024). Kuwait Freedom of Information Act: The Construction of Constitutional Governance. International Journal of Comparative Law, 1(13).

Other studies have been concerned with analyzing the impact of the free flow of information on policy governance and raising the efficiency of public administration by contributing to improved transparency, accountability and rule of law indicators

7- Magda Abdel Shafi Mohammed (2023). Digitization as a mechanism for re-engineering public facilities to reduce administrative corruption. Journal of Legal and Economic Studies, 9 (1).

This also ensures that access to government information enhances the transparency of procedures and texts related to public decision-making, which helps to apply the principle of accountability, which becomes more realistic thanks to citizens' access to sufficient information to track the link between decision-making and government employees.

Research plan

Topic 1: Framework for legal protection of information and access to the Internet

The first requirement:

legal protection of personal information internationally

The second requirement:

legal protection of personal information in Arab laws

The Challenges of Open Information Access in Arab Systems

The second requirement:

Topic 2:

Saudi Arabia and the field of personal information protection, Open data accessibility and availability

The first requirement:

The reality of data protection and the availability and accessibility of information

in Saudi Arabia

The second requirement:

Saudi legislation on the protection of information and accessibility

Third requirement:

The authorities concerned with the availability and accessibility of information

Higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is defined as a public network used around the world
and connects millions of computers consisting of multi-
source networks and tasks, such as home networks, which are limited in their use to a group of individuals, and academic, commercial, and small government networks. The Internet began in the form of the Network Agenc

y for Advanced Research Projects in 1969, a wide network established by the Agency for Advanced Research Projects of the United StatesMinistry of Defense, and was considered as a network to test new network technol ogies, and it has connected many different universities and research centers, in order to ensure the possibility o f transferring information between devices.

And the availability of information online in the Arab world has become a vital topic in light of the rapid techn ological development that the world is witnessing, and the Internet is today the first source of information and knowledge, but the availability and accessibility of this information varies greatly among the countries of the Arab world, as a result of various factors including infrastructure, political systems, the level of digital awaren ess, and the laws regulating that process, which

makes there is a disparity between countries in the availability and accessibility of information.

The study examines the nature of the availability of information through the Internet and the ease of access to i t in general and in higher education institutions in particular, and the extent to which this is regulated and prote cted through the legal systems in the Arab countries and the challenges facing the availability and accessibility of information, and the most prominent experiences in the Arab region represented in the model of the Kingdo m of Saudi Arabia.

First topic

Framework for legal protection of information and access to the Interne*t*

The Internet deserves to be the mother of all inventions, it serves as the fuel for it, and at the same time the Inte rnet is a double-edged sword, as it, like all inventions, has its dark side sometimes misused, but also has many benefits.

And with the rapid digital revolution, information has become the cornerstone of all aspects of life, whether ec onomic, social, educational or even security. The Internet, with its enormous capacity to store and share data, h as changed the way we handle information, making it easier and faster to access than ever before. And with thi s huge technological development, fundamental challenges have emerged regarding how to protect information on the one hand
and ensure its availability to authorized parties on the other, which has put society before a delicate equation th at needs a careful balance between security and digital freedom.

This puts us in either direction, each of them more important than the other, the first is to enhance the availabili ty of information through the Internet in all fields and scientific and cultural goals for all individuals, etc., and t he other is to ensure the protection of information and the confidentiality of some of them and the extent of the ir privacy to the entity that owns them, whether governmental or private, we will present in the next sections w hat international laws address to the protection of information and the extent to which its availability and acces sibility are regulated in Arab legal systems as well.

First requirement

Legal protection of personal information internationally

Information protection refers to a set of procedures and techniques aimed at ensuring confidentiality, integrity and availability of information. These measures include multiple measures such as encryption, access manage ment, security surveillance, and privacy policies, all of which seek to address growing cyber threats, such as ha cks, identity theft, malware, and organized attacks on digital infrastructure. On the other hand, the availability of information is a fundamental principle in the modern knowledge society, as it enables individuals and institu tions to make decisions based on accurate data, and contributes to enhancing transparency, enabling education, and supporting innovation, and with the increasing reliance on the Internet as a major means of information ex change, there is an urgent need to create clear regulatory and ethical frameworks that ensure a balance between the right to access information, and the right to protect privacy and digital security. The need to protect system

s and users from cybercrime, and to respect the right to access information and ensure freedom of expression in the digital space, which is one of the basic principles of human rights in the modern era.

The Budapest Convention (2001), known as the European Convention against Cybercrime, is the first international treaty aimed at combating crimes committed online, with mechanisms for cooperation between countries in this field. The General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union (GDPR) is a striking example of legislation that seeks to protect the privacy of individuals and regulate the use of their personal information. At the United Nations level, the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Use of Cyberspace (UNCCT) continues to work on developing a legal framework to deal with issues of cybersecurity and freedom of information. In addition, there are international initiatives such as the Freedom Online Coalition, which includes several countries committed to promoting freedom of expression, privacy and online security. Which will review in the following in digital analysis.

1. Budapest Convention (2001)

It is the first international treaty aimed at combating cybercrime
and was developed by the Council of Europe with the participation of non-
European States as well. The agreement establishes a unified legal framework to criminalize activities such as system hacking, data manipulation, and cyber fraud. It also organizes international cooperation between law enforcement agencies to facilitate information sharing and rapid response to cross-
border cyber attacks. And although they are of European origin, countries outside the continent such as the United States, Canada and Japan have joined them, while the majority of Arab countries remain outside.

2. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - 2018

It is legislation of the European Union aimed at protecting the personal data of European citizens, whether processed within or outside the Union. This regulation obliges any entity (company, institution, website...) that obtains user data, to obtain explicit consent, and to clarify how the data is used, while granting individuals access to it, correcting it, or requesting its deletion. It is one of the most stringent laws in the world in the field of digital privacy, and it has influenced the policies of global companies and even the legislation of some countries outside the European Union.

3. Freedom Online Coalition

Founded in 2011, it is an international coalition that currently includes more than 30 countries, and aims to promote freedom of expression, privacy, and online security.

The initiative seeks to support open internet policies, and ensure that censorship or surveillance tools are not used to violate human rights. It works through cooperation with governments, civil society organizations, and technology companies, and issues reports and recommendations that help promote users' rights in the digital space.

4. United Nations Efforts - (UNCCT and Cyber security Task Forces)

The United Nations, through several agencies and initiatives, such as the United Nations Counter-
Terrorism Center (UNCCT) and the Government Expert Group on Cyberspace Developments (GGE), is closely following cybersecurity issues. They are working to develop international rules for the use of cyberspace in the context of international security, and encourage countries to share experiences, develop their technical and legislative capabilities, and strike a balance between combating digital threats and ensuring fundamental freedoms.

As for the availability of information and the ease of access to it, international texts have confirmed the principle of the right to access information to all natural and legal persons and the public without discrimination, through government publication or by request, the right to access all public information and documents that are no longer confidential, with some exceptions specified exclusively and this right also includes a request to correct personal information in legally specified cases, and that the information that obligated administrations must pu

blish is: laws, decrees and their reasons, administrative decisions, circulars and memoranda, and annual reports on the activities of administrations obligated to present their budget and administrative activities, as for administrative information and documents that can be viewed by request, they are all public documents in all their forms, whether printed, electronic, visual or audio, including correspondence, contracts, studies, reports and budgets, but not all information is available, as this general principle is determined by specific exceptions in the law in a list related to public or weighted interests, including: defense and security secrets, foreign state relations, trade and professional secrets, those affecting the financial and economic interests, the national currency of states, private lives and health of individuals, and a host of other secrets protected by special laws.

In order to achieve the goal of facilitating access to information, departments must develop electronic platforms, assign and train an information officer and provide the necessary tools that allow him to respond within legal deadlines to requests for information. The United Nations has developed several principles that include an information ecosystem that provides choice, freedom, privacy and security for all, where people everywhere can express themselves freely and make informed and independent decisions, namely:

Community trust and resilience

Community trust and resilience are essential components of information integrity. Trust refers to people's confidence in the reliability and accuracy of the information they see, and the flexibility in communities' ability to deal with disrupting or manipulating the information ecosystem.

Health incentives

Advertisers and technology companies can adopt business models that support human rights, enhance information integrity, and achieve good business logic at the same time.

Empowering the public

Shifts in tech companies' policies and increased media knowledge could enable users to have greater control over their online experience and use of their own data.

Independent, free and pluralistic media

The integrity of information can only be achieved through independent, free and pluralistic media. Strong and urgent responses are needed to support the press that serves the public interest around the world.

Transparency and Search

Increasing transparency and access to data is vital to improving understanding of information environments around the world and providing evidence-based solutions to enhance information integrity.

Second requirement

Legal Protection of Personal Information in Arab Laws

Despite the disparity in the level of digital readiness among Arab countries, some governments have begun to adopt legislation in line with international standards, such as personal data protection laws, combating cybercrime, and establishing national cybersecurity bodies. However, there is still a clear gap in joining or effectively interacting with major international conventions such as the Budapest Convention mentioned earlier, as only a limited number of Arab countries have joined or expressed their intention to join them. The region faces special challenges, including weak regional coordination, the absence of a unified legal infrastructure, as well as the delicate balance between protecting national security on the one hand, and ensuring digital freedoms on the other hand Respect the privacy of users and make digital knowledge available to all.

The status of protection and freedom of information in Jordan:

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was the first Arab country to adopt a Right to Access Information Act in 2007 (Law No. 47), which gave citizens the right to access government documents and make official requests for information. However, the law faced significant obstacles in its application: poor awareness of the law within government institutions, a lack of a culture of transparency, and the rejection or complete disregard of a large number of requests, under the pretext of national security or the "public interest[1]"

Jordan then launched the Nazaha Project and Platform, which was launched in 2013. It is a national campaign that aims to raise awareness of our legal and human right to access information, supports the civil society integrity project in defending and promoting this right, seeks to educate citizens and civil society throughout Jordan on how to exercise this right, monitors the application of the law to ensure that citizens have a fair access to this right, and works with local and national partners throughout Jordan to spread awareness about the right to access information, with the aim of enabling Jordanians to participate fully in ensuring transparency, accountability and integrity at the local and national levels. To this end, the Nazaha team works with civil society organizations across the Kingdom to implement projects –
to support local communities in obtaining the necessary information for them, and to provide training and capacity building workshops for individuals and institutions to enable them to participate in the movement to obtain information, and to improve citizens' understanding and awareness through a series of awareness campaigns.

Status of protection and freedom of information in Tunisia:

Historically, Tunisia is the second Arab country to legalize the right to access information under Decree No. 41 of 2011 on access to administrative documents, and then the 2014 Constitution, which affirmed -
in Chapter 32 -
the role of the state in guaranteeing the right to the media and the right to access information and communication networks, but although the law is one of the most advanced systems in the Arab world, its application faces challenges due to the decline in freedom of expression since 2021,[2] and laws against "false news" that are used to silence media voices .[3]

Protecting and Freedom of Information in Lebanon:

The Right to Information Bill (Law 28) was passed in 2017, but has not yet been implemented due to the lack of political will, the postponement of legislative sessions, and the long-
standing political instability in Lebanon, yet civil society continues to demand it as a necessary requirement for democracy and transparency

Availability of Information in Kuwait:

Kuwait seeks to digitize government services to facilitate access and provide them more efficiently by providing electronic platforms for submitting requests, completing transactions, and obtaining information. One of the most important and prominent forms of information availability in Kuwait is the establishment of the Kuwait Information Network of the Central Agency for Information Technology, which represents the information technology infrastructure in Kuwait, and aims to provide a safe and fast environment for information exchange between government agencies. Based on the responsibility of the Central Agency for Information Technology in developing and implementing the general policy of the State in the field of information systems and technology, the Central Agency recently signed a contract to develop the Kuwait Information Network to support the State's vision of electronic transformation of all applications and services between government agencies and to provide a modern, high-
speed and secure network for the transfer and exchange of information of all kinds and provide the latest protection and cybersecurity solutions to protect data and information in line with the latest standards.[4]

Information Protection Status in Morocco:

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[1] Jordan Picnic Project and Campaign, Official Website: About Nazaha – nazaha-jo

2 Article titled (Fact-checkers in Tunisia face information scarcity and limited open data), 2024, International Journalists Network: https://ijnet.org/ar/story

[3] Decree No. 41 of 2011 dated May 26, 2011, relating to access to administrative documents of public bodies: https://legislation-securite.tn/ar/latest-laws

[4] The official website of the Kuwait Information Network, https://cait.gov.kw/ar/projects/kuwait-information-network/

Despite the political openness and institutional development that Morocco is experiencing, the State still has a monopoly on most means of producing and disseminating information. The transparency and accountability standards of the administrations are still waiting for their role to be integrated in the management of public affairs, he said, adding that "the Moroccan legislature still views with great suspicion the right of citizens to access information, and the general principle in this regard is almost the principle of prohibition, not permissibility, restriction, not availability, six years after the entry into force of Law No. 31.13 on the right to access information.

It is clear to us from the previous extrapolation that the situation of freedom of information in the Arab countries is still suffering from major challenges, despite some limited improvements in recent years. Although a few countries, such as Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco, have passed laws to guarantee the right to access information, their application is often weak, and requests for information are complicated or ignored. In contrast, other countries lack clear legislation in this area, while imposing strict security and political restrictions that limit transparency.[5]

Third requirement

Challenges of Open Information Access in Arab Systems

The process of legalizing the right to information has slowed significantly in most Arab countries, despite the passage of legislation that recognized the right of citizens to access information available to public administrations and institutions; The implementation of these laws has been confined to regulatory texts that were issued only after a very short period of time. Regardless of the delay in the issuance of applied regulations in some systems, the restrictions that entailed them contributed to the superiority of the technical approach over the human rights treatment in activating this vital constitutional right. The late constitution of this right in most Arab experiences resulted in the expansion of the exceptions contained in the right to access to information instead of narrowing it. Procedurally, several factors have accumulated to contribute to accelerating measures aimed at regulating the right to access to public information in the Arab region, including pressure from international financial institutions, which have become more "strict" in monitoring the extent of countries' commitment to publish financial and monetary data to develop means of financial cooperation, in addition to the focus of the network of United Nations organizations and partner countries on improving indicators of policy and program exposure as a condition for upgrading the horizon partnership, as well as the growing societal demand for public policy transparency in the midst of the Arab Spring and its follow-up attempts to stabilize in some countries Internal collapses on the other.[6]

In most Arab countries, restrictions are imposed on access to information online, blocking websites or controlling the quality of available content, which hinders the ability of individuals to access information sources and the lack of knowledge of reliable sources, which leads to a decline in the flow of information and impedes the process of progress and keeping pace. Also, the technological infrastructure varies among Arab countries, for example, the Gulf region, whose technological infrastructure is higher and stronger than some Arab countries that suffer from slow internet speed, which makes it difficult for individuals to access information in general, and digital illiteracy plays an important role in the file of easy access to information and its availability in addition to data protection in a systematic manner, and among other factors facing the challenges facing the availability of information are the limited promotional and educational measures, and the resulting narrowing of awareness of the mechanisms of access to information, in Jordan, the most prominent survey research that half of government employees do not know anything about its requirements .

second topic

Saudi Arabia and the field of personal information protection

Open data accessibility and availability

[5] Article entitled (Application of the Access to Information Law Faces Massive Challenges in Morocco), 2025, Has Press Newspaper, article link: //www.hespress.com/%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%8A%

[6] Zaanoun, Abdul Rafi 2024, The Effectiveness of the Right to Access Information in the Arab Region, a Study on the Arab Rowaq website, Study Link: https://cihrs-rowaq.org/

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attaches great importance to the protection and security of information in light of the technological development and the rapid digital transformation witnessed by various sectors. And Saudi authorities have realized that information security is the cornerstone of building a secure and stable digital environment that preserves the privacy of individuals, ensures the confidentiality of sensitive data, and protects vital infrastructure from cyber threats. And from this standpoint, the Kingdom has developed clear strategies and policies, most notably the National Cybersecurity Strategy, and established specialized bodies such as the National Cybersecurity Authority, with the aim of strengthening the protection system and developing national competencies capable of facing modern digital challenges.

Access to information is a key pillar of Saudi Arabia's transparency, empowering citizens and residents, and supporting data-driven decision-making. In this context, the Kingdom has adopted a few initiatives and legislation, most notably the "Open Data Access Policy" and the "Right to Information System", which aim to enable individuals to access government information in a fair and orderly manner, without prejudice to the confidentiality of sensitive information or private rights. The government agencies are also working to develop integrated digital platforms to facilitate access to data, within the framework of Saudi Vision 2030, which seeks to build a knowledge society and a developed digital economy. In the following requests, we will review the most important and prominent features of the current situation in the Kingdom and the unparalleled development it has witnessed in the field of information protection and access via the Internet, the current legislative system with its developments, and then the efforts made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to ensure easy access and availability through specialized agencies, official initiatives, and others.

First requirement

Data Protection and Access in Saudi Arabia

Not many years ago, there was no comprehensive legal framework regulating the protection of personal data in Saudi Arabia. As a result, personal data was subject to misuse or uncontrolled processing, especially as reliance on electronic services increased. Individuals also did not have sufficient awareness of their rights to protect their data, creating a trust gap between users and those who handle their personal information.

But in recent years, the Kingdom has witnessed great development in the field of data protection, considering the accelerated digital transformation and the increasing reliance on technology in various sectors. And this aspect was reinforced by the issuance of the Personal Data Protection System in 2021, which represents a comprehensive legal framework to protect the privacy of individuals and regulate data collection and processing. The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) is responsible for monitoring the application of the system, which works to ensure that entities adhere to national and international standards for data protection. This development reflects the Kingdom's commitment to building a secure and reliable digital environment that enhances the confidence of individuals and investors.[7]

As for the idea of making information available online and easily accessible in the past, government information was not easily available to the public, and obtaining official data faced several challenges, including the absence of reliable digital channels or the absence of clear legislation to ensure the right of individuals to access information. Some entities also kept data closed, which hindered opportunities for scientific research, data-based decision-making, and community participation. This affected the level of transparency and trust between government agencies and citizens and led to limited use of public information in developing services or supporting innovation.[8]

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[7] The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) was established by Royal Order No. (A/471) dated 12/29/1440 AH. It is directly linked to the Prime Minister and is organizationally linked to it: the National Data Management Office, the National Center for Artificial Intelligence, and the National Information Center. The Authority has a legal personality and administrative and financial independence, and its headquarters is in the city of Riyadh. Link to the Authority's official website: https://sdaia.gov.sa/

[8] Omar Muhammad Sulaiman Al-Jamaaz, 2024, Personal Data Protection Law and its Implementing Regulations, issued by the Saudi Judicial Scientific Association, updated version dated 12/1/1445 AH.

But the Kingdom quickly took quick steps in this file, as part of its efforts to enhance transparency and accountability among all government agencies first, the Kingdom has made important steps in the field of information availability and accessibility And the most prominent of these steps is the issuance of the right to information system in 2019, which guarantees individuals the right to access non-prohibited information held by public entities, and the government has launched many open digital platforms, such as the "Open Data Platform", which provides diverse data sets that can be used by citizens, researchers and entrepreneurs. These efforts are in line with Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasizes the importance of building an information society based on knowledge and information openness.

And the Kingdom has developed several regulations and authorities concerned with the protection of personal information and between the protection of freedom of access and ease of access and ensuring the security of information in a balanced manner, including, for example, national data governance policies, which we will elaborate on later, controls and specifications for national data management and governance and protection of personal data, and the adoption of a system for electronic transactions, the system to combat information crimes, and the development of basic controls for cybersecurity in the Kingdom.

second requirement

Saudi legislation on information protection and accessibility

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has adopted a comprehensive legal framework to support digital transformation in the production and provision of government services, and this legal framework is fully consistent with the prevailing trends globally and ensures the availability of the main enablers of e-government. This framework allows the establishment of digital identity, digital signature, and public key infrastructure that can be used to provide services to both the public and private sectors, and this is supported by the adoption of the electronic transactions system, the communications system, and the e-commerce system.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issued a personal data protection system under Royal Decree No. (M/19) on September 17, 2021, and it entered into force in March 2023 after regulatory amendments, which is the first comprehensive legislation regulating the collection and processing of personal data in the Kingdom. On the other hand, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognized the value of data as a strategic national asset that contributes to decision-making, economic transformation and transparency. Based on Vision 2030, the government has developed a comprehensive set of policies and regulations that ensure easy access to open data for all individuals and relies on national data governance policies and national data management standards and personal data protection. This regulation clarifies the rights of individuals to request access to unprotected public data, as well as the responsibilities of government agencies in dealing with these requests.

First: The current personal data protection system in Saudi Arabia 2021

The main objectives of the Personal Data Protection System are to protect the personal data of individuals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ensure respect for the right to privacy, and regulate the processing, storage, and transfer of personal data.

And enjoy the system of personal data protection in the Kingdom (PDPL) wide scope and affect a large group of entities and individuals, whether inside the Kingdom or abroad, the system applies to the entities responsible for processing data in the Kingdom, as well as to the entities outside the Kingdom that process personal data of individuals in it, and this wide scope means that any entity that processes personal data of individuals in the Kingdom is obliged to comply with the system and regulations, regardless of the place of processing, and the system has been designed to ensure the management of personal data responsibly and safely, in line with international standards, taking into account the privacy and local context of the Kingdom, which in turn dedicated doo

r and under the system of personal data protection in the Kingdom, financial penalties can be significant in the event of non-compliance.[9]

And the Saudi organization was keen to tighten the penalties, as it stated in Article 35 that anyone who disclosed sensitive data or published it in violation of the provisions of the regime shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding (two) years and a fine not exceeding (three million) riyals, or by one of these two penalties; If this is done with the intention of harming the data subject or with the intention of achieving a personal benefit, .[10]

And raise the limit of fines up to 5 million Saudi riyals, and sometimes penal penalties in the event of deliberate violation or misuse of data.

Second: Regulating the right to information, accessibility and accessibility

The Saudi Information Protection System does not regulate the freedom of access to information but rather regulates the protection of personal information as mentioned above. As for the availability and accessibility file, Saudi Arabia does not have a law in the legislative sense of the right to access information, but it has an official regulatory policy officially approved by the Council of Ministers that regulates this right, and it is administratively binding on government agencies, and gives individuals a broad right to access public information, unless it is protected or confidential, and it is announced in advance under the name (Freedom of Information Policy) issued by the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) and the National Data Management Office (NDMO) .

This policy applies to all individuals' requests related to access to public information produced by the Authority, regardless of its source, form, or nature, and this includes paper records, e-mails, information stored in computers, audio and video tapes, maps, photographs, manuscripts, handwritten documents, and other forms of recorded information. This policy does not include data hosted by the Authority, and the provisions of the Freedom of Information Policy do not apply to protected information, which is classified data (highly confidential, confidential, and restricted).

This policy aims to establish the basic principles, controls and responsibilities for freedom of information in all ministries in the Kingdom, official bodies and even civil society, organize the process of disseminating public information, maintain public information at the concerned authority, and support efforts to enhance integrity by accessing public information as a human right guaranteed by transparency and fair access to public information to enhance competitiveness and equal opportunities.[11]

The most prominent items of the right to information policy are summarized in several forms and steps starting from the obligation of the authorities to disclose, as government agencies are obligated to answer requests unl

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[9] Article Thirty-Five of the Data Protection Law:

Without prejudice to any more severe penalty stipulated in another law, the penalty for committing the following violations shall be as stated before it:

A- Anyone who discloses or publishes sensitive data in violation of the provisions of the Law shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years and a fine not exceeding three million riyals, or by either of these two penalties, if the intent is to harm the data subject or to achieve personal gain.

B- Anyone who violates the provisions of Article Twenty-Nine of the Law shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding one million riyals, or by either of these two penalties.

-The Public Prosecution shall be responsible for investigating and prosecuting the violations stipulated in this Article before the competent court.

-The competent court shall consider the lawsuits arising from the application of this Article and impose the prescribed penalties.

The competent court may double the fine in the event of a repeat offense, even if it results in exceeding the maximum fine, provided that it does not exceed double this fine. Full text of the law: https://laws.boe.gov.sa/boelaws

[10] Article Thirty-Six of the Data Protection Law: Unless specifically provided for in Article Thirty-Five of the Law, and without prejudice to any more severe penalty stipulated in another law, any natural or legal person covered by the provisions of the Law who violates any of the provisions of the Law or its regulations shall be punished by a warning or a fine not exceeding five million riyals. The fine may be doubled in the event of a repeat offense, even if it results in exceeding the maximum fine, provided that it does not exceed double this fine.

A decision shall be issued by the head of the competent authority to form a committee (or more) with no less than three members, one of whom shall be designated as the chairman, and one of whom shall be a Sharia or legal advisor. The committee shall review violations and impose the warning or fine stipulated in paragraph (1) of this article, depending on the type of violation committed, its seriousness, and the extent of its impact. The committee's decision shall be approved by the head of the competent authority or his authorized representative. The head of the competent authority shall issue, by decision, the committee's operating rules, specifying the remuneration of its members.

Anyone against whom a decision has been issued by the committee stipulated in paragraph (2) of this article has the right to appeal it before the competent court. Full text of the system: https://laws.boe.gov.sa/boelaws

The Saudi Authority

[11] Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority, Right to Access Information: https://sdaia.gov.sa/ar/SDAIA/AboutPortal/Pages/FreedomInformation.aspx

ess the information is within the exceptions stipulated in the policy, which we will be exposed to later, and then the right to submit the request. The policy stated that any individual (citizen, resident, or even visitor) has the right to request information from government agencies, without the need to mention a cause or personal interest, in detailed periods and steps in the policy, but the most important thing in that part is the exceptions to the right to request or make available information, the policy stipulated that the party submitting the request has the right to reject it if the information relates to national security, foreign policy, personal or health data of other people, criminal or judicial investigations, trade secrets, intellectual rights of a third party, internal documents or consultations before making a final decision, until the appeal and grievance addressed by the policy, how it is submitted, and how it is decided on the third party's origin. It is free to obtain it, but a fee can be charged only if physical copies are printed or prepared (not for the application itself). It also addresses the protection of the applicant's person to obtain information by stipulating that the applicant's identity or the use of information against him is prohibited, unless he violates the law.[12]

Third requirement

Entities concerned with the availability and accessibility of information in

Higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom has developed a plan that includes a set of provisions and procedures governing the exercise of the right of access to public (unprotected) information produced by public bodies, regardless of its source, form or nature; In order to promote the principle of transparency and integrity through official initiatives and the establishment of bodies and platforms that make all information available to all individuals, after the issuance of the aforementioned legislation and policies, the Kingdom has issued the smart government strategy, which was set for the period (2020-
2024), which confirms the Kingdom's ambition, vision, goals, initiatives and plans that contribute to enhancing the digital availability of information from the government.[13]

It also established specialized bodies as mentioned above in the field of information protection, on the other hand, the ease of access and availability of unprotected information, including a body called digital government, and the Digital Government Authority works to promote the principle of transparency in the dissemination of its data, in order to promote research[14], scientific and academic fields in particular   The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA), which is the competent authority in the Kingdom of data and artificial intelligence, includes: Big Data, which is the national reference in everything related to its organization, development and dealing, and it has the inherent competence in everything related to operation, research and innovation in the data and artificial intelligence sector, which was established by Royal Decree No. (A/471) dated 29/12/1440 AH and is directly linked to the Prime Minister, and its most important objectives are to continue updating the national data agenda and artificial intelligence in line with the main principles of the Kingdom and in line with Vision 2030.

And entering the file of education and the availability of information in it, the Kingdom has witnessed a tremendous and rapid development in the field of easy access to information in the file of education and linking it to the Kingdom's Vision 2030, in several evidence and practical experiences in higher education, education in the Kingdom has achieved competitive achievements globally in providing distance education and e-
learning mechanisms for male and female students at all levels of study, thanks to the support, attention and unlimited follow-up by the wise leadership - may God support it -
to develop education in the Kingdom, in accordance with the objectives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, and the Human Capacity Development Program.

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[12]   Saudi National Data Governance Policy File in effect, 2021, Second Edition, dated 05/26/2021 file:///F:/PoliciesAr.pdf

[13] Digital Transformation in the Kingdom, National Platform, Digital Government Legislation, Official Website of the National Platform:
https://my.gov.sa/

[14] Establishment of the Digital Government Authority. Cabinet Resolution No. (418) was issued on 07/25/1442 AH, after reviewing the recommendation of the General Committee of the Cabinet No. (4933) dated 07/20/1442 AH approving the organization of the Digital Government Authority:
Digital Government Authority

And the Saudi model of distance education and e-learning has received many international guidelines, the latest of which is the study issued by the World Bank entitled: (Digital Education and Distance Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.. Experiences from the Corona epidemic and opportunities to improve education), and the Ministry of Education announced on its official website that it is pleased to receive different categories of visitors from entrepreneurs, the private sector and government institutions to benefit from the open data of the Ministry of Education and benefit technically in several forms such as the creation of research, reports and statistics, in addition to the development of applications on the Internet Web Applications or on smart devices Mobile Applications in various operating systems, whether iOS or Android, and so on, which was based on several basic principles declared to all called the main principles of open data, including that the origin in data is availability and the need for continuous data updating, and non-discrimination between individuals in the ease of access to data on any basis and free data for all   But on the other hand, open data is subject to a license that defines the statutory basis for the use of open data as well as the terms, obligations and restrictions imposed on the user.

The role of the Ministry of Education in making open data available:

First, despite the strength of the ICT infrastructure and the high quality of digital culture, in the Kingdom

Saudi Arabia in general and its public universities, but the universities that were keen to make (open data) available and updated continuously were less than what was expected or needed by the research and scientific field, specifically higher education.[15]

The Ministry of Education subsequently adopted open data to help provide education-related data in the Kingdom to all beneficiary visitors (research centers, universities, and students). Open usable data has been approved, visitors can reuse it, and it is available in the form of files (XML, XLS), and this property enables the relevant parties to link with this data through XML files and process them. And the Ministry of Education aims through the availability of open data to create awareness among all beneficiaries about statistics, reports, studies and research on education in the Kingdom, which leads to the sharing of knowledge from the perspective of a knowledge society, educated and informed. Based on the Ministry's awareness that in addition to enriching public participation, open data increases transparency between the Ministry and the relevant authorities, and the latter has announced that it is pleased to receive different categories of visitors from entrepreneurs, the private sector and government institutions to benefit from the open data of the Ministry of Education and benefit technically in several forms such as the establishment of research, reports and statistics, in addition to developing applications on the Internet Web Applications or on smart devices Mobile Applications in various operating systems, whether iOS or android and so on.[16]

Many Saudi universities, such as King Saud University, King Abdulaziz University, and Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, have established open data portals that provide a range of data related to academic performance, scientific research, employment, and electronic services. These data usually include statistical information, academic reports, insensitive student data, and other statistical data for the university, but there are some obstacles to the path of access to data. For example, King Abdulaziz University offers a data portal that contains reports and statistics,[17] but it lacks detailed documentation and explanation accompanying published data, which makes it difficult for external users to understand the context or use data effectively. These two examples reflect the urgent need to develop the institutional and technical infrastructure to provide high-quality open data that contributes to enhancing transparency and supporting research innovation. Despite the advanced technological infrastructure of Saudi universities, they face challenges related to data governance, ensuring privacy, and the quality and continuous updating of published data. The most prominent of these challenges are:

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[15] Abdulrahman Faraj, 2019, Open Data and its Management in Saudi Universities: An Analytical Study and a Conceptual Vision for Establishing a Research Data Facility, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press.

[16] Ministry of Education Open Data, official website: https://moe.gov.sa/ar/knowledgecente, visited July 30, 2025

[17] King Abdulaziz University Open Data Observatory: https://www.kau.edu.sa/Pages−od.aspx, visited July 30, 2025

1. Lack of update and continuity Many open data portals do not occur periodically, making the data inaccurate or unfit for practical use.

2. We found that most universities focus on general statistical data only, while lacking the diversity of data such as research data, academic performance, or budgets.

3. Poor usability and accessibility Some data portals are not designed in a way that makes it easier for users to access or download data easily, if the data student is from outside the university and lacks intuitive user interfaces.

4. In the absence of a clear legislative framework, there are no uniform national standards (law) that require universities to publish a specific type of data or in a certain way, which leads to a large disparity between universities.

5.Some academic bodies still view data as an asset to be protected, not as a resource to be shared to enhance knowledge and transparency.

6. Poor interaction with the research community and beneficiaries due to lack of awareness of data availability, there are no effective mechanisms to receive user feedback or develop content based on the needs of researchers or developers.

CONCLUSION AND RESULTS

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has paid great attention to the protection of personal information, as it has issued a personal data protection system that regulates the collection and use of data and ensures the privacy of individuals, and is also working to apply strict cybersecurity standards, as part of efforts to enhance digital trust and achieve the goals of sustainable development. In recent years, legal and technical protection has witnessed remarkable development through updating systems, raising the efficiency of infrastructure, activating censorship, educating the community and raising awareness of personal protection of information.

And with the emergence of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, open government data has become a very important role in all institutions, as it guarantees community members access to information and benefit from it in all fields, the most important of which is the educational field and educational institutions, and as universities produce enormous data, it has become important to have it available on their government websites through specialized open data platforms, the Kingdom has witnessed remarkable progress in making open data available, as part of its efforts to achieve transparency and support the digital economy, and the government launched platforms such as "Saudi Open Data" to provide data from various government agencies, and encourages universities and institutions to publish regularly, which promotes innovation and data-based decision-
making in higher education institutions, and universities have started to create open data portals, and publish information on academic performance, scientific research and management, contributing to supporting research and developing student and technical projects, but until now needs many development and modernization, especially with regard to the research and scientific data produced by Saudi universities because of scientific importance and research that benefit the whole society and its real-life results. as follows:

1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is establishing a solid legal framework for the protection of personal data, which enhances digital trust, and supports its transformation towards an innovative digital economy that is compatible with global standards.

2. The system clearly guarantees the rights of data owners to individuals such as access, modification, deletion, and withdrawal of consent, while obliging the institution to report data breaches even to the deceased if it is possible to identify them

3.An independent, specialized body that oversees law enforcement, with strong powers including investigation, inspection, issuing warnings, and imposing fines, is the Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA)

4. Adoption of fines and strict penalties such as publishing sensitive data exposes those involved to imprisonment

for up to two years or a fine of up to 3 million riyals, multiplied by contracts and public violations for which a warning or fine of up to 5 million riyals is imposed, and multiplied also in cases of return.

5.Government entities, including ministries and agencies, have made thousands of data sets available via the national open data platform, enhancing transparency and helping citizens and stakeholders with a connection.

6. The open data platform at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University was characterized by achieving the first place with 66.

7. Six Saudi public universities have achieved average ratios with their open data platforms: Saudi Electronic University, Tabuk University, King Abdulaziz University, King Faisal University, Majmaah University, and Imam Abdulrahman University

8. Open data platforms are available across nearly 21 Saudi public universities, most of which are below average in achieving standards

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhancing community awareness by increasing awareness campaigns for individuals and institutions about their rights and duties to protect personal data, and reporting mechanisms in case of any infringement on personal data

2-
 Developing human and technical capacities through training of government and private sector data protection officials

3- Developing open data portals in Saudi public universities to achieve a high percentage of scientific benefit.

4- Making the strategic plan publicly available through the open data portal in Saudi public universities.

5. Continuously updating and diversifying the quality of open data files available so that they can be used more through open data portals in Saudi universities.

6. Raising awareness of the importance of open data in Saudi public universities and publishing guidelines through open data platforms, which contributes to raising awareness among beneficiaries and naming them, including the example of the Open Data Portal, the Open Data Platform, and the Open Data Observatory.

7. Enhance cooperation between regulatory authorities and encourage coordination between the Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA), the National Cyber Security Authority, and other relevant authorities to ensure the integration of regulatory and preventive efforts.

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