

Beyond Traditional Boundaries: Defining Cyberfeminism Among Emirati Women on Social Media

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Abstract:

The portrayal of Middle Eastern women on social media has been broadly linked to patriarchal roles and religion. However, the emergence of digital media tools provided women with tools to define their own narratives. The gaps in the research include a gap in how Instagram influences the definition of cyberfeminism, as well as a gap in defining the term outside of Western context. The research method employed a qualitative analysis based on a purposive sampling approach to recruit 10 Emirati women with backgrounds that challenged traditional stereotypical roles of women. The findings reveal that the participants initially resisted stigmas related to feminism and defined the term through a collectivist cyberfeminism framework, which focused on the empowerment of women over the use of terms related to Western ideologies and emphasized the importance of cultural preservation while embracing technological advancement.

Keywords: Culture, Emirati women, Feminism, Instagram, UAE

1. Introduction

The social system in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been traditionally shaped by a patriarchal society (Moghadam, 1992). Within a patriarchal system, the senior man exerts authority over family members, including younger men and women (Moghadam, 1992). However, social and family systems constantly change due to the influential transformations that occur within culture and society (Joseph & Slyomovics, 2001). Recent studies have highlighted the emergence of Arab women activists, and their engagement on social media has enabled women to form their identities within the public sphere by utilizing platforms such as Facebook or blogging to express their perspectives to the public. Therefore, women started to communicate openly as a result of social media (Radsch & Khamis, 2013).

Feminists identify men's monopoly of technology as a source of their power, while women's lack of technological skills is an element of their dependence on men. In addition, early feminists analysed how the role of technology leads to reproducing patriarchy (Wajcman, 2004). While cyberfeminist discourse accepts technology does indeed have a patriarchal character, it also insists digital media is more diffuse and open. Therefore, cyberfeminism

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marks a new relationship between feminism and technology (Wajcman, 2004). However, the definition lacks a culturally embedded perspective. Therefore, for this article, Instagram, an online photo and content-sharing application, was chosen as the social media platform to provide an Emirati context for how women use digital media to balance modern self-expression with traditional values. As a platform, Instagram offers multimodal affordances, such as the use of photographs, captions, and videos, that enable women to explore and define their identities in different ways (Hurley, 2019). The use of Instagram as a tool obtains information beyond traditional static data collection systems, and provides multimodal tools such as the ability to communicate orally, visually, and in written forms (Macias-Carceller, 2015).

Digital Platforms and Feminist Campaigns

Digital platforms are defined as tools that promote social development, enhance community awareness, and facilitate important campaigns (Siddiqua, 2019). In addition, they are crucial tools capable of reshaping identity (Haraway, 1985). However, this framing assumes only a positive impact without addressing the sociopolitical contexts of digital platforms. For example, while the article addresses how the misuse of digital platforms could degrade the status of women by leaking their private information to the public, it lacks depth in exploring how cultural norms surrounding honor in Middle Eastern society could maximize these risks (Siddiqua, 2019). Further analysis regarding the measures taken by Emirati women to prevent exploitation needs to be studied to fill the research gap.

The rise of social media allowed feminist campaigns to flourish at the collective and individual levels. In addition, social media is used as a tool for women to pursue their own social and political purposes (Wajcman, 2004). For example, different uprisings in the Middle East, such as Iran's uprising in 2009 and Egypt's in 2011, led to virtual campaigns that shaped the public view (Marshall, 2023). However, despite the efforts of virtual campaigns, a critical issue here is the dominance of Western feminist frameworks, which continue to universalize their perspectives by portraying women in Third World countries as victims of patriarchy (McEwan, 2001). Furthermore, second-wave feminism focused on gender stereotypes and denied the existence of gender differences between women and men (Wajcman, 2004). However, this view contradicts the realities of Middle Eastern societies, where gender identities are shaped by forces such as religion and tradition. Further research is crucial to study how digital media challenges the views of Western feminist frameworks (Marshall, 2023).

Digital Identities and Dual Accounts

Social media is defined as an internet-based application built on the ideology of Web 2.0, in which users can create content and exchange messages (Melati & Widhi, 2018). While this definition emphasizes connectivity and self-expression, it overlooks the socio-cultural forces that shape how users manage their digital identities. According to the article, one of the reasons that drives users to create dual accounts is to reflect selected aspects of their self-concept. However, the article remains focused on the psychological motives behind the creation of dual accounts, treating self-concept as an individual choice rather than looking at the cultural and

gendered context. Therefore, the study lacks an analysis of the cultural factors that drive users to create such accounts. The current research aims to build on those findings by further exploring how cultural values and societal pressures relate to the creation of dual Instagram accounts.

Media Representation of Gulf Women in English Language Newspapers

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries started promoting policies related to the advancement of women's roles within society during the mid-1970s. Gulf governments support women's empowerment, which is defined as the establishment of equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities for both women and men across all domains of society, through the media. The article examined the role of English-language media in GCC states by extracting news headlines from English-language newspapers published between the years 2008 and 2017 in the six GCC states. The analysis of the article revealed positive portrayals of women's empowerment across the six GCC states. However, the participation of women within the public sphere remains constrained by tribal patriarchy and cultural stereotyping (Muller & Camia, 2023). While Muller and Camia shed light on the relationship between GCC governments and the media, they mention the limitations faced, such as the necessary inclusion of social media in future research due to the increased importance of social media outlets, as well as linking media to the audiences to highlight the impact the media might have on the broader society (Muller & Camia, 2023).

Intergenerational Value Change in Emirati Women's Lives

The article explored the push and pull of traditional boundaries within a collectivist society through the lens of social change and human development theory, which was constructed in the Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft paradigm, a theory developed in a Western context. The article reveals that changes such as intergenerational value change, technological advancement, economic development, formal education, and urbanization become more complex when they occur during times of rapid change (Alteneiji, 2023). As a result, the fast demographic, economic, and political changes the UAE witnessed also brought other adjustments in the value systems held by different generations of Emirati women (Alteneiji, 2023). The article provides insight into generational value change, but the framing of Emirati women as traditional versus modern oversimplifies the way Emirati women live. Therefore, the current research will explore how Emirati women use digital media as a tool for cultural continuity in times of rapid change.

Reimagining Middle Eastern Feminism

Middle Eastern women are portrayed as inferior and imprisoned by their traditional and cultural beliefs. On the contrary, women in the West are portrayed as superior and liberated (Khodary, 2020). The article argues that such portrayals continue due to the lack of literature written from a Middle Eastern perspective, allowing Orientalist stereotypes to dominate the narrative (Khodary, 2020). The article also highlights how this perceived oppression fueled resistance among Middle Eastern women and empowered them to change the stereotypical roles through nationalist motives. Such movements resulted in challenging the dominant Western discourse

related to Middle Eastern women (Khodary, 2020). Moreover, the misleading portrayal of Middle Eastern women led scholars, such as Sedghi, Babibker, and Sharoni, to challenge the dominant narrative by further exploring how Middle Eastern women have resisted oppression. Thus, revealing that Middle Eastern women are fighting a different fight than Western feminists (Khodary, 2020). While the research provides case studies of Iraqi, Palestinian, and Kurdish women of Turkey and how they navigate such portrayals in areas of conflict, the current research seeks to address portrayals outside a conflict-based narrative by investigating how Emirati women use digital media to challenge external misrepresentations of Middle Eastern women.

2- Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative methods approach to explore how Emirati women engage with digital media and challenge traditional gender roles. This method was chosen due to its strength in uncovering a more in-depth understanding of participants' beliefs, motivations, and experiences (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Furthermore, the use of the qualitative method held several advantages, such as establishing in-depth connections by meeting the participants face-to-face and through video conferencing, allowing for additional interpretations of non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language.

Through a purposive sampling approach, participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) Emirati women residing in the UAE; (b) familiarity with regular use of digital platforms; (c) an active presence on Instagram, including a public profile with over 100 followers; (d) consistent sharing of content on Instagram, whether related to personal interests, lifestyle, or professional activities; and (e) recognition within their social or professional circles for their hobbies, careers, or digital influence.

The final sample consists of Emirati women aged between 24 to 40, including entrepreneurs, athletes, managers, students, and artists. This diverse representation ensured a varied sample of perspectives, with each participant contributing to the research by sharing their unique experiences that challenged traditional expectations of women's roles in the UAE. The focus on depth and diversity aligns with the goals of qualitative research, which seeks to provide insightful context. After conducting 10 interviews, saturation was reached, which refers to the point in data collection when no new themes or insights emerged (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data Collection

Data was collected between September 2024 and January 2025 using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in identifying and analyzing emerging patterns with the collected data. First, the process began with familiarization, where all interviews were read multiple times to ensure deep engagement with the data. Then, the initial codes were generated manually by highlighting words that the participants would repeat. After that, the codes were examined and grouped into potential themes of emerging meaning, which were refined during the phase of reviewing themes. Then, each theme was named, given a short description, and a supporting

quote from the participants. Finally, a detailed section was written using data extracts that were selected to support each theme and link them to the research question and theoretical framework. This approach allowed for a further interpretation of how Emirati women navigate digital media.

The interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and were either conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing using tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. It is crucial to mention that such advances in information and communication technologies offered new opportunities for interviewing participants via online video conferencing, as the availability of convenient alternatives also guaranteed the participants more choices in terms of flexibility (Archibald, 2019). To be culturally appropriate, pseudonyms were used for the participants who preferred to remain anonymous, while the participants who consented to include their original names in the article were kept. The interviews were conducted using the Arabic language as the preferred language of communication, with occasional switches to English when participants found it easier to express certain feminist concepts. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants, such as their name, pseudonym, age, profession, and marital status.

Table 1 – Overview of the Participants

Name	Nationality	Age	Student/Employed	Marital Status
Participant A	UAE	33	Self-employed	Single
Noura Al Harasi	UAE	31	Employed	Single
Maha Al Zaabi	UAE	27	Employed	Engaged
Participant B	UAE	33	Employed	Single
Sara Al Naqbi	UAE	26	Employed	Single
Participant C	UAE	24	Student	Single
Participant D	UAE	26	Self-employed	Single
Participant E	UAE	38	Self-employed	Married
Eman Al Raesi	UAE	40	Employed	Single
Participant F	UAE	40	Employed	Married

3- Thematic Overview

The following table provides an overview of the key themes that emerged in the data collection, along with a brief description and supportive quote from the participants.

Table 2 – Summary of Identified Themes

Theme	Short Description	Quote
1. Navigating Digital Spaces as Emirati Women	Instagram is used as a platform by Emirati women as a form of self-expression through digital journaling, business promotion, and cultural awareness.	Participant A: <i>I mostly post content on Instagram to promote my artwork, using it as a portfolio for potential clients.</i>
2. Performing Cultural Identity Online	Emirati women integrate tradition with their self-expression and view digital media as a place to preserve and promote their own heritage.	Participant C: <i>We are conservative in our values, but in terms of community, people like things that support their culture. For example, when I create artwork related to Emirati culture, I get a lot of support.</i>
3. Digital Selfhood and Visibility	Independence is viewed as financial, social and personal autonomy but within cultural and religious values. The emergence of digital media has shifted norms but enabled more visibility and progress.	Participant F: <i>I believe independence redefines traditional roles, where a woman can be a mother, a leader and a business owner at the same time.</i>
4. Reframing Feminism: Local Feminist Views	Emirati women reframe feminism as collective empowerment rooted in tradition and is labeled as balance between both genders.	Participant F: <i>Feminism is empowering women to achieve their potential and supporting them to be active members of society, but without diminishing the role of men, as both genders complement each other.</i>

Navigating Digital Spaces as Emirati Women

Digital media are tools used to promote social development and enhance community awareness (Siddiqua, 2019). Within digital media, social media platforms emerged for online users to communicate with each other, and technological development is seen as an index of a society's advancement (Wajcman, 2004). To Participant A, Instagram is used as a promotional tool, as

she explains, “*I mostly post content on Instagram to promote my artwork, using it as a portfolio for potential clients.*” On the other hand, other participants use Instagram as a digital journal, as Participant B explains, “*I like sharing content related to my adventures, or stories about my travels, similar to journaling.*” Similarly, Participant C mentions, “*I post about my daily life on Instagram, such as my work, and currently, my journey while continuing my studies in London.*” In addition, Instagram proved to be a supportive tool for local businesses, as Participant E says, “*My Instagram accounts have become public, and it is always posts related to my business.*” Indeed, the use of Instagram as a marketing tool for businesses not only ensures brand awareness but also provides Emirati women with a secure platform to engage in their business without external social pressures (Wally & Koshy, 2014). While the use of social media prompts people to form different connections, some engagement on social media is done through the creation of dual accounts, which is the case with Noura, as she details, “*I chose to have two accounts, one is private, and the other is public because I do not want anyone to cross limits with me. I did not enjoy some of my interactions and realized some posts I uploaded online were misinterpreted.*” The previous point indicates how the creation of dual accounts helps users show themselves under a chosen self-concept with different identities, which shows an awareness of gender boundaries within Middle Eastern culture (Melati & Widhi, 2018).

Social media also prompts criticism of provocative posts. However, Participant B did not encounter such incidents, as she explains, “*I do not provoke people online because I respect culture and traditions. I draw clear boundaries with online users, but if I got a comment I do not like, I would either delete it or ignore it.*” Indeed, culture can be seen as the driving force that shapes how Emirati women navigate social media, as well as the placement of online boundaries, which is one of the measures taken to prevent possible exploitation (Siddiqua, 2019). While being mindful proves to be a crucial step to avoid being cyber-exploited online, Participant E believes it is not easy to avoid being cyber-exploited entirely, as she shares, “*I do not think you can avoid it. There is always someone who is going to put a mean comment, but you reach a point in your life where you know who you are and where you stand.*”

Performing Cultural Identity Online

Traditional and cultural values tie the community together despite the advancement of technology, as Participant A explains, “*By defining and preserving traditions in a balanced way, it allows us to feel connected to our heritage without isolating us from the world.*” Indeed, the UAE is witnessing fast demographic, economic, and political change (Alteneiji, 2023). However, common values remain the anchor that ensures they remain interchangeable, as Noura mentions, “*I come from Alain, and we are still traditional. My family is reserved, and I think the boundaries they have are for my good, as it does not affect the life I want to live nor the life I am living currently.*” By describing her family’s boundaries as non-restrictive, Noura therefore contradicts the argument that women’s participation within the public sphere is restricted due to tribal patriarchy (Muller & Camia, 2023).

Expanding on this idea, participants described how both religion and tradition are the driving factors that influence their public visibility, as Participant B explains, “*If my religion or*

traditions prevent me from appearing on social media in a certain way, I would accept it and respect it.” Indeed, despite modernization, Emirati women remain conservative, as Participant C says, “We are conservative in our values, but in terms of community, people like things that support their culture. For example, when I create artwork related to Emirati culture, I get a lot of support. So, while we are conservative, we also like highlighting what makes us special and unique as a culture.” The previous point emphasizes how the portrayal of Middle Eastern women through a Western context promotes an inaccurate representation of Muslim women and their experiences (Vohra, 2023).

Participants, such as Eman, further challenge this misrepresentation, as she elaborates, “We are open to progress and change, but we empower individuals in a way that keeps them connected to their roots and traditions. We encourage women to be out there, and together, our government helps working mothers to have careers while also taking care of their families.” Indeed, the establishment of the General Women’s Union in 1975 worked on supporting Emirati women and ensuring their effective participation within society as they navigate different roles, from being full-time employees to mothers (General Women’s Union, 2024).

Alongside governmental efforts, Sara credited Instagram for encouraging users to become more expressive, as she says, “There is a growing trend toward being more open and self-expressive, especially among the younger generation, but while we are embracing a more globalized modern image, it sometimes contrasts with traditional norms around modesty or privacy.” Therefore, due to the emergence of social media, the younger generation is becoming more self-expressive, which is the difference between the younger generation and the older generations’ approach to feminism and digital media (Marshall, 2023). Likewise, Participant E mentions, “Social media tries to steal you away, especially on the explore page, where I believe a lot of posts are not the posts that I am used to viewing.” The previous statement reveals how Instagram algorithms could manipulate the type of content distributed, as the content appearing on the explore page has no connection to users’ preferences (Poleac, Niculina, & Babii, 2024). Such influences could therefore challenge values, as Participant F expresses, “I believe Instagram can influence thinking patterns and social behavior, especially among the younger generation. It is important to use it in a positive way to maintain a balance between modernity and tradition.”

Digital Selfhood and Visibility

Women in the Middle East are portrayed as prisoners of their traditions and cultural beliefs (Khodary, 2020). However, the emergence of digital media provides women the opportunity to define their narratives, as Participant A says, “Independence means being financially self-sufficient, having the freedom to move around, and making decisions that align with the law and my moral compass.” While Participant A defines independence in personal terms, Sara connects independence with cultural identity, as she explains, “It is about creating a balance between tradition with self-reliance and empowering myself and other women to take charge of our futures.” Indeed, with the emergence of education and women’s empowerment, women

have become a source of income in the family, as well as social agents of change (Alteneiji, 2023).

Independence is also expressed through online content sharing, as Participant A mentions, *“I remember when it was taboo for women to appear in the media. For example, simply appearing in a photo or on video was once heavily scrutinized and even used as a tool for blackmail. However, such concerns are hardly relevant today, which is a sign of progress.”*

For some, this transformation is deeply tied to personal identity. As Participant C explains, *“I see people abandon their identity, believing they will gain more opportunities by becoming more Westernized, but that is a misconception. You do not have to let go of your identity for people to take you seriously or listen to you.”* The previous point stands in contrast to the theory of individualism, which, according to Hamamura, is defined as a social pattern in which individuals view themselves as independent of collectives (Hamamura, 2012). While individualism encourages a person to detach from collective identities, Participant C’s viewpoint suggests that true independence is related to self-realization without having to conform to external expectations of identity.

On the other hand, Participant E connects independence with the opportunities the UAE vision has given Emirati women, as she says, *“We are living in the era where women can work and hold high positions. While you would see women working as teachers in schools before, it was rare for women to have full-time jobs or positions.”* Indeed, the political vision established by His Highness, the late Sheikh Zayd Al Nahyan, encompassed women taking more senior roles in all sectors (Eugenie, 2015). Similarly, Participant F believes independence is reflected through, as she shares, *“My independence is expressed through artistic and cultural workshops that I participate in. I believe independence redefines traditional roles, where a woman can be a mother, a leader, and a business owner at the same time.”*

Reframing Feminism: Local Feminist Views

With the rise of social media, contemporary forms of feminism emerged (Bakytzhanova, 2020) and the internet has become one of the main strategies that enabled women to engage in technology and link their experiences related to gender discrimination and feminist theories (Flores, 2018). However, stigmas related to feminist ideas are associated with the different waves of feminism, ranging from liberal to radical views (Asenbaum, 2020). Eman describes this further as she shares, *“The term is very interchangeable from one context to another, and I find it cliché and misused.”* By resisting the stigma related to feminism, Participant A redefines the term through her own words as she says, *“Feminism is about recognizing my strengths and weaknesses as a woman and creating my path, rather than viewing the world through the lens of the opposite gender.”* Building on the previous definition, feminism should go beyond individual experiences, as Noura adds, *“Feminism needs to fight for the rights related to you, your sisters, and daughters, and to the common good that we want to see continuing for years ahead. It is a movement that includes people around me and not just me as an individual.”* Similarly, Maha recognizes how feminism is represented differently on

Instagram, as she shares, *“These platforms often emphasize traditional gender roles or portray an idealized version of feminism, which can lead to an unrealistic image of what feminism truly stands for.”* Participant B shares a comparable perspective, in which she says, *“At one point, the movement had a clear goal of demanding basic rights, but it went through different waves to the point where women began comparing themselves to men.”* Indeed, women are equally recognized in the Qur’an as having rights to learn, attend educational organizations, and even hold positions in education and different sectors (Eugenie, 2015). Therefore, Islam is recognized as an early force for women’s rights. However, due to distorted images related to feminism, it is often associated with different movements, as Participant C explains, *“Feminism is about the anti-male movement. It is unfortunate because feminism used to be a compelling struggle for equality.”* On the other hand, some participants, such as Participant E, emphasized femininity in their views on feminism, as she explains, *“If a man invites me to dinner, I still expect him to pay because I enjoy embracing my femininity and being treated like a lady. While I feel like an alpha at work and at home, in other areas, I prefer to maintain my feminine side.”* She further reflects on gender equality in the Arab world, stating, *“In the Arab nation, we do not seek the same kind of gender equality promoted abroad.”* Indeed, the previous statement emphasizes Khodary, Salah, and Mohsen’s point that Middle Eastern women are fighting a different fight than Western feminists (Khodary, 2020).

While Participant E emphasizes the importance of maintaining femininity, Participant F acknowledges the diverse portrayals of feminism on social media, as she says, *“Feminism on Instagram takes on a different form, but feminism is empowering women to achieve their potential and supporting them to be active members of society but without diminishing the role of men, as both genders complement each other.”*

Emirati Women Navigating Digital Spaces

Social media serves as both a personal and professional platform for Emirati women, as some participants use Instagram as a tool to promote their work in art, culture or business. Whereas other participants use Instagram as a digital journal in which they share aspects of their daily lives. However, as Instagram can expose participants to unwanted interactions, the creation of dual accounts helps them set boundaries to protect their privacy. The use of dual accounts aligns with Wajcman’s views, in which she indicates that digital technologies enable users to choose their disguises and alternative identities (Wajcman, 2004). In addition, the preference for sharing curated aspects of their lives on social media is due to some of the major setbacks of digital media to women, such as the threat it carries to personal privacy and exposure of private moments (Siddiqua, 2019). While there are no specific steps taken to ensure the spread of cyber-exploitation, participants reveal how they practice various strategies to navigate social media carefully, such as managing multiple accounts, limiting personal information, or being selective about online engagement. Their approach reflects an awareness of the opportunities that digital media brings, as well as the challenges that come with maintaining a digital presence, as digital media alone cannot provide a solution to issues women may face (Siddiqua, 2019).

Social Media's Role in Cultural Preservation

News coverage across GCC countries related to women's empowerment is mainly positive (Muller & Camia, 2023). While some participants view Instagram as a tool for cultural preservation, others argue that it also challenges traditional values. Sara, for instance, acknowledges that the growing trend to be more self-expressive on Instagram could contrast with cultural norms around privacy. Likewise, Participant E expresses concerns that Instagram could dilute cultural values, particularly when algorithms dominate digital spaces. Despite these challenges, Participant F notes how platforms such as Instagram are capable of influencing thought patterns and social behavior. Therefore, the use of social media does not directly threaten tradition when used with awareness. Additionally, it can become a powerful tool for Emirati women to redefine the meaning of modernity and tradition at the same time.

Digital Selfhood Redefined

The UAE went through significant transformations from tribal settlements into national visions and investments in science, technology, space, and innovation. Such economic changes also brought social change and modernized narratives related to gender roles (Alteneiji, 2023). Therefore, stereotypes related to the portrayal of Middle Eastern women as prisoners of tradition are being reshaped through digital platforms (Khodary, 2020). Therefore, is about exercising self-determination within cultural frameworks, as Participant A views independence as control over individual life choices. The previous points align with the modernization theory, which suggests that as societies evolve, individuals continue to prioritize personal autonomy (Hamamura, 2012). However, the participants resist Western individualism and instead, a local feminist model is introduced in which identity and culture are both sources of strength and not constraints. Furthermore, the idea of independence is linked to career progression, as Participant E acknowledges that the recent transformation of women's roles in the UAE challenged past limitations (UAE, 2019). Ultimately, independence is not about entirely rejecting traditional roles of women, but it is about redefining them to align with personal goals, while still honoring cultural values.

Feminism: Emirati Women's Perspective

Rather than rejecting feminism as a term, participants are reframing it to align with their values. For example, Noura, Participant B, and Participant F emphasize that feminism should reflect cultural and religious norms. While other participants, such as Participant E, reinforce how Arab women embrace their different roles from balancing their femininity, to embracing their empowerment and tradition altogether. Ultimately, feminism in the UAE is therefore viewed as a culturally grounded movement related to women's empowerment that aligns with the cultural and traditional values of the UAE rather than being a Western term driven by political ideologies.

4- Conclusion

Emirati women articulate a redefined version of feminism grounded in collective empowerment, intergenerational responsibility, and aligned with religious and traditional norms. Their perspectives suggest a form of feminism that combines personal growth and

community well-being. In contrast, Western feminist frameworks often emphasize individualism and promote a more universalized feminist framework. Therefore, Emirati women are not only navigating social media but actively reshaping the misrepresentation of Middle Eastern women. In addition, the emergence of platforms such as Instagram serves as a tool for curating a cultural version of cyberfeminism, one that integrates family, religion, and social responsibility into narratives of women's empowerment. By doing so, participants demonstrate that feminism can be reimagined in ways that preserve tradition while also embracing modernity.

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Limitations of the study

The study was limited due to the interpretations of each participant, as different answers were given based on personal experiences. In addition, since the research focused on collecting qualitative data, it explored the perception of the participants, but without identifying statistics.

Future Work

Building on the qualitative data collected, future research could adopt a mixed-methodology approach with a broader sample from different MENA regions to explore feminist perception further. In addition, incorporating a focus group discussion could also help in developing a more unified definition of cyberfeminism among Emirati women. As for policy implications, the findings suggest that integrating a UAE-based feminist narrative into the UAE curriculum could help further the understanding of gender discourse aligned with cultural values. Last but not least, in order to promote digital literacy among Emirati women, policymakers could consider effective collaborations with local institutions to develop culturally sensitive digital policies in order to enhance the safety of Emirati women while they navigate digital spaces.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

The following semi-structured interview guide was used to explore the participants' perspectives on social media, cultural values, independence, and feminism. Questions were grouped into four thematic sections for a focused discussion.

Section 1: Social Media

1. What social media platforms do you use?

2. Are your social media platforms private or public?
3. What do you like to post on social media?
4. Following up on the previous question, what are the posts that became popular on your account?
5. What encouraged you to start using Instagram?
6. What type of comments do you usually receive on social media?
7. In what ways does using Instagram affect you?
8. Have you witnessed any instances where women were being cyber-exploited online?
9. Following up on the previous question, how do you avoid being cyber-exploited online?

Section 2: Society and Culture

1. How would you define your understanding of the traditional cultural values of the UAE?
2. What role do societal or traditional cultural values play in the way you use Instagram?
3. Have you witnessed any instances where you believed Instagram is changing traditional cultural values?
4. How do you approach modern cultural values?

Section 3: Independence

1. What does independence mean to you as an Emirati woman?
2. In what ways do you express your independence on Instagram?
3. Do you believe independence is changing gender roles in the UAE?

Section 4: Feminism

1. As a successful and independent woman, do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?
2. What do you know about 'feminism'?
3. Elaborating on the first question and in your own words, what is 'feminism' to you?