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The Impact of Social Media Platforms on Identity and Cultural Heritage within Arab Communities

1 Abdelkader MAKHLOUF*
University Centre Nour Bachir; El-Bayadh (Algeria)
a.makhlouf@cu-elbayadh.dz,
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6898-5975
2 Abdelkader TALBI
University Centre Nour Bachir; El-Bayadh (Algeria)
etudtalbi@yahoo.fr,
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6603-2214

Abstract:

Social media platforms have dominated the relationships among people and the way they communicate with each other in an unlimited number of ways. Virtual communication has been more prevalent due to the use of social media platforms enhanced by the application of modern technology. This helped people to gain access to more communication options open to the world, encouraging freedom and breaking away from all social or intellectual restrictions prevailing in society. Social media platforms have significantly impacted contemporary Arab societies, dismantling the stronghold of identity and heritage in a digitally dominated world. The present scientific paper examines the impact of social media platforms on identity and heritage in Arab society. Its aim is to reach the (positive and negative) changes they have brought about in society.

***Abdelkader Makhlouf**

Introduction

Today, the world is witnessing major transformations in ideas and concepts against the background of cultural globalization, which has pushed modern communication technology to the limits of affecting individuals and groups. By consequence, people's lives have turned into a life based on electronic devices in everything, including their private lives, which are based on communication as an important element in building relationships' continuity.

Electronic means of communication have become an alternative to papers and classic telephone communications. This is very natural, as the world is developing from one era to another. In this sense, the Gutenberg press has transformed ideas into deep inscriptions in paper, and information technology came to rob paper of its materiality after turning it into electronic documents[1]. This can be exchanged via electronic media from anywhere in the world.

The Gutenberg press has changed the means of communication among people, but it did not affect their relationships and views toward each other. In contrast, modern technology has changed the means and forms of communication among people, but it affected their values and ideas.

It is also important to note that globalization has affected the Arab culture. This is very true because globalization often seeks to penetrate the Arab culture, through spreading a culture of consumption and corruption, and sometimes through choosing identity penetration and defacement of its tissue to weaken the bond that binds human beings. It is natural that these changes in the structure of culture and values impact identity and heritage in a world enslaved by digitalisation.

This topic opens the field of research in overstepping these influences from individuals to societies in the Arab society in general and the Middle East in particular. The importance of this type of research in social and cultural studies serves the present and future of Arab society. The topic regards also to address the problems of Arab society that are growing increasingly every day.

Research problem and questions

The primary problem addressed in this paper is the extent to which social media platforms have influenced the cultural identity and heritage of Arab societies. In an era where globalization and digital communication transcend geographical boundaries, Arab communities face the challenge of maintaining their unique cultural identities while embracing modernity. This tension raises

critical questions: How do social media platforms contribute to the erosion or preservation of cultural heritage? What are the implications for individual and collective identities within Arab communities? And, how do these digital interactions shape the future of Arab cultural identity in the global landscape?

The importance of this subject lies in the close relationship between identity and heritage, and the practices that are issued by the person's sense of belonging to a shared cultural heritage. A person's identity is revealed through the heritage that has been deposited in his culture successionally.

Research objectives

The objectives of this paper are multifaceted:

1. To analyze the impact of social media platforms on the cultural identity and heritage of Arab communities.
2. To identify the positive and negative influences of social media on these communities.
3. To explore the role of social media in the potential erosion or preservation of cultural identity.
4. To assess how these platforms contribute to the creation of new social dynamics and identities within the Arab world.

Research hypotheses

This research is guided by the following hypotheses:

1. Social media platforms have a significant impact on the cultural identity and heritage of Arab communities, contributing both to their preservation and erosion.
2. The rise of digital communication is creating new forms of identity that are distinct from traditional cultural norms.
3. The influence of social media on Arab identity is shaped by factors such as generational differences, the level of digital engagement, and exposure to global cultures.

Method of analysis

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach based primarily on secondary data and literature review rather than original quantitative data collection. The study relies on secondary statistical reports (e.g., DataReportal,

Kemp reports) and combines them with qualitative content interpretation of existing literature and documented online behaviors.

By exploring the dynamic relationship between social media, identity, and heritage within Arab communities, this paper aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how digital platforms are reshaping cultural landscapes. Ultimately, this research underscores the need for a balanced approach that recognizes both the opportunities and challenges presented by social media in preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Arab world.

The Relationship of Identity to Heritage

It is difficult for any researcher to present a comprehensive concept of identity and heritage. Each of them has a large number of definitions and concepts that cannot be covered in this research. Nevertheless, it is possible to define some of them before presenting the relationship between them.

Identity is one of the modern terms that have many definitions. It is an individual or collective feeling of self. It is the product of self-awareness that I/we have, and the feeling and qualities of being separate and distinct from others[2]. This means that identity is a unit of integrated physical and psychological elements that make a person different from others[3].

As for heritage, in its broadest sense, it goes beyond the limits of dictionaries that combine it with inheritance in one meaning and link them to inheritance in money and ancestry[4].

In its broader meaning, heritage constitutes the cultural content of the identity of the nation or society, which is the psychological stock of masses and vital emotional energy of the nation[5]. It is also what the predecessors left behind in terms of scientific and literary traces, which are considered valuable for the present era traditions[6].

Outside the conceptual and theoretical framework, identity and heritage are combined in the form of a currency that gives value to human being. There is no identity without heritage, and there is no heritage if identity is not established. Heritage and identity are two inseparable elements of the self, and two complementary components of the individual and collective personality[7]. One cannot dispense from the other. Thus, heritage is an essential component of identity, and identity expresses and transmits heritage. Nations are also known for their heritage identity, which is embodied by culture and civilization by preserving heritage in its multiple forms, patterns and manifestations[8].

The methodological framework includes:
(1) Nature of the study: descriptive and analytical;
(2) Data sources: secondary reports (e.g., Digital Reports), academic literature;
(3) Method of analysis: interpretive content analysis of documented trends;
(4) Limitations: absence of primary field data and limited regional coverage.

The Spread of Social Media Platforms and the Trueness of Marshall Mcluhan's Statement

According to the Digital 2025 Global Overview Report (DataReportal), global internet users exceeded 5.35 billion and social media users surpassed 5.04 billion in 2025, reflecting a significant increase compared to earlier figures.While earlier datasets were used for illustration, more recent statistics confirm the continued rapid expansion of digital platforms:

Figure 01 Global Digital Landscape (2025)



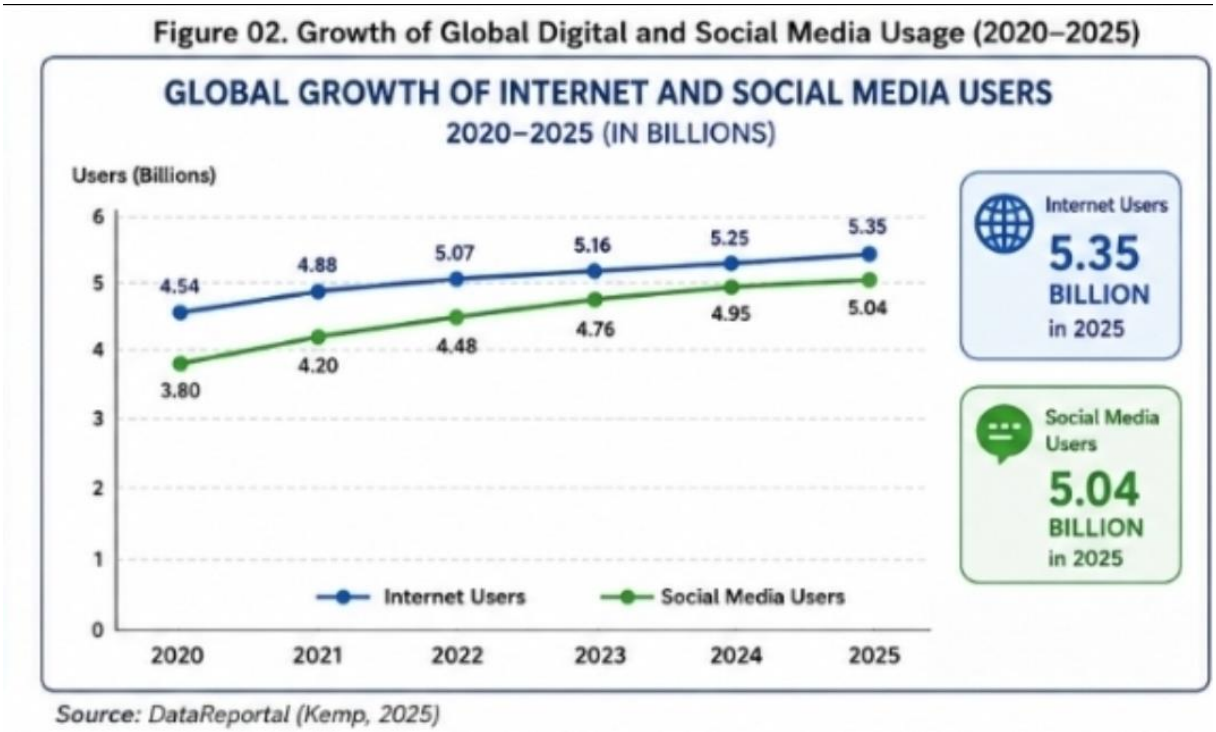
Source: DataReportal (Kemp, 2025), Digital 2025 Global Overview Report

Figure 01 illustrates the global digital landscape as of 2025. The number of internet users exceeded 5.35 billion, representing more than 66% of the world population, while social media users surpassed 5.04 billion. Mobile connectivity remains dominant, with over 5.6 billion mobile users worldwide. These figures

demonstrate a substantial increase compared to 2020, confirming the accelerated integration of digital technologies into everyday life.

The updated data confirm that digital communication has become a central component of human interaction globally. This reinforces the argument that social media platforms are no longer supplementary tools but fundamental environments where identity construction and cultural exchange occur. The expansion also suggests a deeper penetration of globalization into local cultures, including Arab societies.

Figure 02 Growth of Global Digital and Social Media Usage (2020–2025)



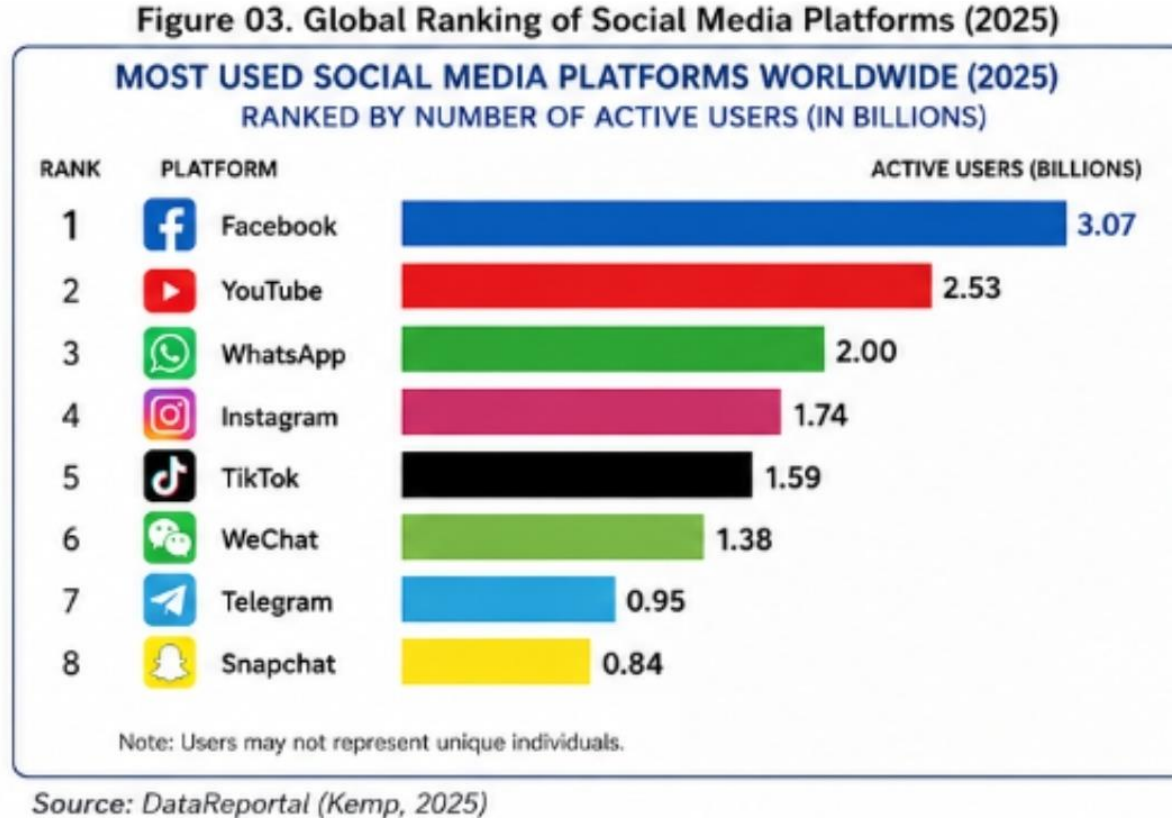
Source: DataReportal (Kemp, 2025)

Figure 02 highlights the continuous growth in internet and social media usage between 2020 and 2025. The increase reflects a steady annual growth rate in digital adoption, with social media users growing by hundreds of millions within five years. This growth is driven by improved connectivity, smartphone accessibility, and platform diversification.

The upward trend confirms that digital environments are expanding rapidly, increasing users' exposure to diverse cultural influences. This expansion plays a crucial role in reshaping identity and heritage by intensifying interactions across

cultures. Consequently, Arab users are increasingly participating in global digital networks that influence their perceptions, values, and cultural expressions.

Figure 03 Global Ranking of Social Media Platforms (2025)

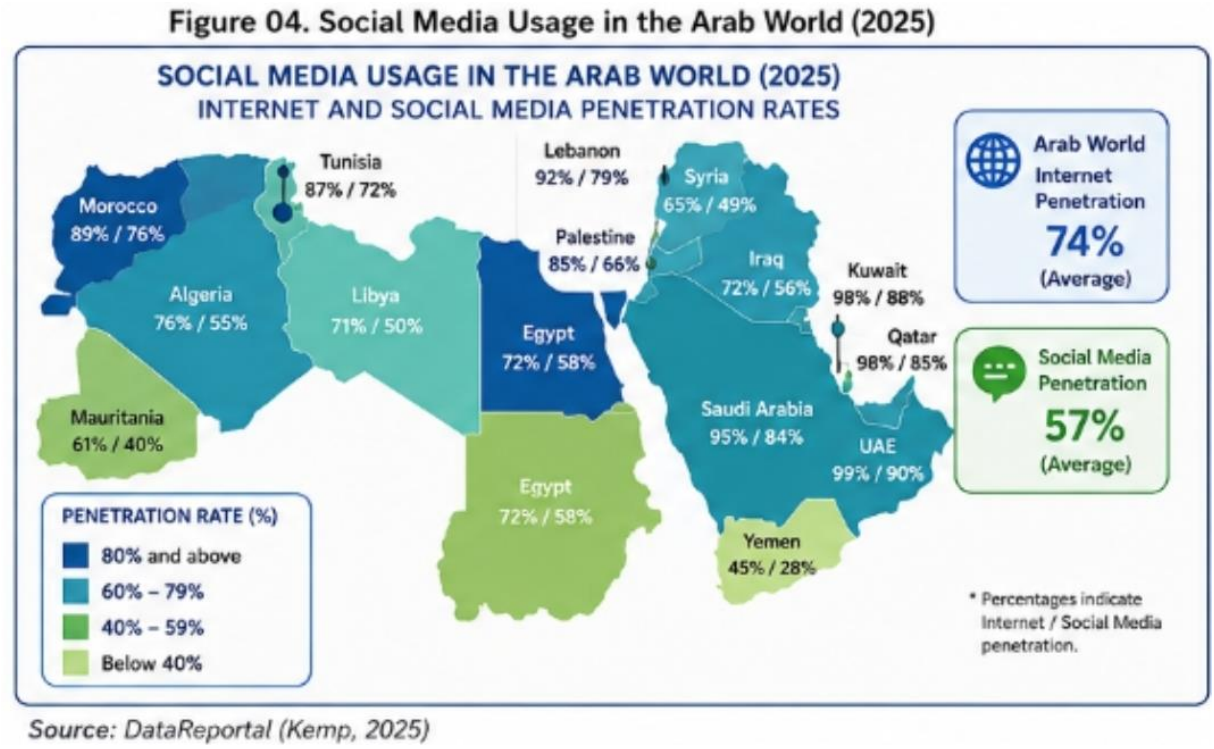


Source: : DataReportal (Kemp, 2025)

Figure 03 presents the ranking of the most widely used social media platforms globally in 2025. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok dominate the digital landscape, each with billions of active users. Emerging platforms continue to reshape user engagement patterns, particularly among younger generations.

The dominance of these platforms highlights their powerful role in shaping communication patterns and cultural narratives. Their widespread use in Arab societies makes them key actors in influencing identity formation and cultural transmission. The diversity of platforms also reflects varying modes of interaction, from visual storytelling (Instagram, TikTok) to community-based communication (Facebook, WhatsApp).

Figure 04 Social Media Usage in the Arab World (with Emphasis on Middle East) – 2025



Source: Data Reportal (Kemp, 2025)

Figure 04 shows social media usage across Arab countries, with a higher concentration of available data in the Middle East region. Internet penetration in many Arab countries exceeds 70%, while social media usage continues to rise significantly. However, the data coverage remains uneven across the Arab world.

The data indicate that a large proportion of Arab populations actively engage in digital communication, making social media a central space for cultural interaction. This widespread use contributes to the emergence of new forms of identity and social organization. However, the uneven representation of regions limits the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Limitations: These statistics predominantly focus on the Middle East (Mashreq) and do not sufficiently represent the Maghreb region (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania), which constitutes a limitation of this study.

Recommendations: Future research should integrate data specific to the Maghreb region to provide a more balanced representation of the Arab world.

Syntheses of figures:

Figures 01–04 demonstrate the rapid expansion of digital technologies and the central role of social media in communication and identity construction. This transformation offers opportunities for cultural preservation while also posing risks of cultural homogenization.

It can be concluded from the previous statistics that Arab community, like people in other societies, have become more inclined to electronic communication and are gradually moving away from face to face communication. It can also be understood that an important part of their lives has become essentially dependent on the virtual space. This means that virtual space is creating new societies with their own distinctive lifestyle, thinking and relationships among their members, i.e., creating new societies that have their characteristics distinguishing them from other societies.

This new picture of the world reminds us with what the Canadian telecommunications scientist Marshal McLuhan foresaw in 1964. McLuhan (1964) summarized his view of the impact of telecommunications technology on people's lives in the future. He pointed out that the world has become an electronic village thanks to modern means of communication. Electronic devices have also become an important part in peoples' lives that control and affect their ideas and institutions[9].

Communication scientists' dream has become a reality in the last century. Today, the world is a single village in which technology has changed people's relationships. Perhaps the amazing paradox of communication revolution is that it brought the estranged people closer and distanced the convergent ones. This makes people communicate easily with people from different places in the world. It takes a lot of time and effort to do so. This is fully considered at the expense of a person's family, wife, children, parents, friends and neighbors[10], who may not communicate with them despite their closeness. This brings up the fact that the virtual relationship has become more important than the real one.

Qualitative Content Perspective

In addition to statistical observations, a qualitative perspective is essential to understand how social media content shapes identity and heritage. Social media posts, comments, and digital interactions often reflect tensions between tradition and modernity.

Platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), and TikTok host debates on cultural practices, language use (Arabic vs. dialect vs. foreign languages), and identity expression.

These discussions reveal both the preservation of cultural heritage and its transformation under globalization pressures.
This qualitative dimension complements statistical data by illustrating how users actively construct and negotiate identity in digital spaces.

The Impact of Social Media Platforms on Identity

Communication technology, information revolution, and internet have fascinated the world. The physical and optical tricks behind using technology didn't allow us to recognize the negative side of moving to the virtual world.

Perhaps the biggest deception involving the use of the Internet is man's belief in social media platforms. It becomes clear that the term "social communication" is very deceptive because it continues to dismiss all temporal and spatial differences. It gives humanity various options to overcome its weakness and lack of resourcefulness. However, social communication remained an assumed communication with no effect on the entire human senses and characteristics that one experiences with the real encounter. It is also social, but it is very individual[11]. This has allowed social media platforms to play largely and effectively on peoples' identities in many different ways, including:

a- Options for identity borrowing and forgery

Social media platforms allow their pioneers to borrow different identities to communicate with others. Some programmers went even further, as they developed special programs and applications to create these fake identities, which gave the pioneers of these platforms the ability to hide behind pseudonyms and fake identities that are used in virtual friendship relationships. It is based on what the person declares about his identity and not on what he really is.

Those people who adopt fake identities justify this practice as a means that frees them from the obligations and restrictions associated with identity and social stigma. In other words, the cold technological relationship frees the individual from various forms of social stigma because the other side of the communicative process is usually not from the affiliation group that limited him with a specific role and identity. Even if the other party is from that group, the hidden identity enables it to participate with a pseudonymous identity[12].This feature also enables him to communicate freely and express whatever he wants without legal, religious or even moral restrictions. It also enables him to communicate freely without offending another person by impersonating his identity for a political or material

purpose that contradicts the principles and morals that are generally accepted by peoples and countries.

b- Call for individualism and insurgency on identity group

Many pioneers of social media platforms seek to be distinguished and unique from others.This goal is natural and legitimate when it's aim is to build an individual that will be an additional building block in the group. However, the spread of individualism in social media platforms is an authoritarian system based on the preference of the individual's will above any kind of external authority such as group, society, traditions and religious beliefs. Thus, the spread of this idea may cause the extremism of the individual that pushes him to adopt the following slogan: the individual's liberation requires a process of liquidation and desanctification of what he received from his parents and teachers[13]. Undoubtedly, this would destroy societies and individuals.

c - Stirring up the strife of minority and hybrid identities

Social media platforms allowed anyone to search for their origins and ethnicity, by communicating with other people who share the same interest or identity. Thus, identity is subject to doubt that is challenged by calling to historical past. However, civilized and underdeveloped countries alike were not spared from this problem. Social media platforms have raised the problem of the relationship between identity and citizenship in many countries, and the issue of hybrid identity has occupied major countries such as the United States of America. The controversy over this issue took a large part of discussion in the intellectual councils on the social media platforms.

The same thing happens in underdeveloped countries, but in a more negative form than it is in major countries. Social networking sites are fueling sectarian and ethnic strife, through identity debates and the problem of "land owners" and "rights owners". This led to social and political tensions that killed a large number of innocent lives in several regions of the world.

Social media platforms have changed people's lives and their idea towards their identities. In addition, "modernization, economic development, urbanization and globalization have led people to rethink and redefine their identities in narrower sentences, and more intimate and sectarian way[14]. It is also worth noting that instead of communication, the language of "no communication" and estrangement became a feature that overshadows many personal relationships between people within the same spatial space.

The Impact of Social Media Platforms on Heritage

The Arab community's view of heritage has been changed due to the repercussions of the impact of social media platforms, positively in some aspects and negatively in others.

a- The positive effect

Social media platforms have allowed people, official bodies and associations in the Arab world to introduce local and national heritage, through the creation of web sites that are concerned with Arab heritage (material and immaterial). Many people have found what they want through these social media platforms because they do not require a high level of education to access and use them. The wide spread of social media platforms across the world allows its digital contents to be accessed by the largest number of followers. These platforms also allowed the possibility to open intellectual and cultural discussions on topics related to Arab heritage, and to shed light on dark aspects of its history.

Among the positive effects is the preservation of the Arab popular heritage. In this regard, we highlight the awareness that has begun to spread among people in the Arab world with the need to defend their identity and heritage. Neglecting heritage is a detachment from the identity and a denial of its origins. Therefore, the continuity of generations through heritage in all its forms is a necessity to maintain it in light of the non-stop Westernization campaigns inside and outside social media platforms.[15]

b- The negative effect:

The negative aspect of the impact of social media platforms on heritage appears in the questioning of its historical and moral value. This implies the alienation from every moral association with heritage, and thus striking the cultural identity of the Arab community.

These ideas are largely broadcast on social media platforms in various forms and with foreign and Arab voices and pens, especially from those who take an extreme position on heritage and its relationship to development or underdevelopment. Taking a position towards heritage is like taking a position on religion and history. This negative relationship towards the West has thus produced distorted positions that need to be reconsidered and reproduced[16]. The unfortunate thing in this matter is that these ideas are transmitted through social media platforms more than other means of communication by creating sites in

which programmed discussions are raised between scientifically and socially unequal parties. Consequently, this influenced the Arab youth who were fascinated by Western civilization, pushing them to break with the Arab heritage.

Recommendations

To enhance our understanding of the evolving communicative environment, characterized by its dynamic relationship of various elements and factors within the Arab community and its far-reaching societal ramifications, it is imperative that researchers tackle the following research recommendations:

1. It is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to explore the evolution of virtual communities over time, both in the Arab community and globally. These studies should examine the formation, growth, and characteristics of virtual communities, including their norms, values, and communication patterns.
2. It is suggested to conduct surveys and psychological studies to assess the impact of the shift from face-to-face communication to electronic communication on social behavior, relationships, and individual well-being within the Arab community. Special attention should be given to investigating whether there are differences in the impact of this shift on various demographic groups.
3. It is recommended to conduct comparative studies to analyze the dynamics and qualities of virtual relationships and their impact on individuals compared to traditional face-to-face relationships. This research should explore whether virtual relationships are becoming more prominent and influential in people's lives.
4. It is recommended to investigate the extent to which the adoption of electronic communication technologies in the Arab community aligns with the concept of technological determinism, as proposed by Marshal McLuhan. This research should explore how these technologies have influenced cultural change, values, and lifestyles.
5. It is encouraged to examine the effects of increased virtual communication on family dynamics within the Arab community. Research should investigate whether the emphasis on virtual relationships has led to changes in familial interactions, support systems, and cohesion.
6. It is wise to compare the findings from research in the Arab community with those from other societies to identify commonalities and differences in the impact of electronic communication on social structures, relationships, and cultural identity through cross-cultural analysis.

7. It is best to investigate how virtual spaces contribute to the formation of individual and group identities within the Arab community. Research should analyze the role of online communities, social media, and virtual spaces in shaping cultural, religious, and national identities.
8. It is recommended to develop and test interventions or educational programs aimed at promoting healthy and balanced use of electronic communication within the Arab community. Research should evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to mitigate potential negative consequences, such as social isolation and relationship conflicts.
9. It is urged to explore the ethical dimensions of virtual communication within the Arab community. Research should address issues related to privacy, online harassment, and the ethical responsibilities of individuals and technology companies in maintaining positive online environments.
10. It is sensible to conduct research on the policy implications of the increasing reliance on electronic communication. This research should analyze how governments and institutions can adapt to this societal shift and ensure that policies support the well-being and connectivity of individuals and communities.

Conclusion

Social media platforms contribute both to the erosion and preservation of cultural heritage. They facilitate preservation by enabling documentation, dissemination, and cultural awareness, while simultaneously contributing to erosion through identity fragmentation, cultural homogenization, and the spread of globalized values.

Summary of main findings:
(1) Social media reshapes identity by promoting hybrid and individualized identities;
(2) It plays a dual role in heritage preservation and transformation;
(3) Its impact varies depending on users' engagement, cultural awareness, and exposure to global influences.

The fragmentation of identities that is increasingly prevailing through social media sites will be even more disastrous than it is now. The reason behind such fragmentation is due to the addiction to social media platforms, which is gradually increasing blatantly. Also, the belief in the philosophy of the clash of civilizations and the end of history under cultural globalization increases world wars.

At the level of Arab society, we must think of urgent solutions to resist the impact of social media platforms. Therefore, there is no room to boycott or abandon these social media platforms, but rather to think about other ways in which we confront their negative effects on our identity and heritage.

The first way, in our view, is to teach children how to deal intelligently with the innovations of technology and modern technology because the good use of this technology is a means and not an end in itself. We must teach them sovereignty over the machine before it prevails us. It is also important to teach them that the will of sovereignty has become more urgent whenever technology threatens more human control[17].

The second way is to overcome our cultural weakness on the global scene, through our pride in our heritage. Of course, the internal weakness is only addressed through cultural, material and intellectual production that keeps pace with the times and preserves the constants of cultural identity because the culture that takes and does not give will remain the weakest. The receiving culture is the one that is easy to control[18]. Finally, as much as we are proud of our identity and heritage, the others will respect us more.

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[18]Kharasan, Bassem. *Aleawlamat Waltahadiy Althaqafi* [*Signs and Cultural Solitude*]. Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 2001, p. 126.