

Representations of Social Relationships in the Saudi Digital Society: An Analytical Study of the Social Media Platform X

Dr. Yahya Torkey Alkhazraj, Samah Mohammed Al-Ghamdi

Department of Sociology and Social Work, King Abdulaziz University

Abstract- Digital communities have enabled a new framework for social interactions, diverging from the nature of traditional relationships. They also play a significant role in producing cultural meanings that both shape and reflect individual awareness, in addition to their ability to influence public consciousness across various aspects of life. These communities serve as spaces for the dissemination and reproduction of culture. This research is grounded in the perspectives of digital sociology and cultural sociology, and aims to explore the representations of social relationships and observe how individuals engage with related posts on the digital community of Platform X (formerly Twitter). Its significance lies in understanding the shifting concept of “community,” which is no longer confined to physical spaces but has become a digital notion built upon shared interests and preferences—such as those found on Platform X.

This qualitative study employed digital ethnography, a method that analyses social practices to understand how people construct meaning. The research analysed 11 posts on Platform X that each garnered over one million views, including a selection of notable replies, all published between 2024 and 2025 within the Saudi digital community.

Among the key findings, the study revealed notable shifts in the institution of marriage in Saudi society, marked by a rise in individualistic values and a decline in the desire to form families through traditional means. Digital communities were shown to pose a threat to marital privacy, as personal conflicts are increasingly shared on the platform and transformed into matters of public debate. Additionally, digital culture has contributed to a reductionist view of marriage, often portraying it as an escape from family life, with decisions to marry based on superficial criteria—suggesting a shallow understanding of marital relationships. Finally, Platform X displayed patterns of social stereotyping, where sarcasm and generalizations are used to reproduce stereotypes related to gender, marriage, and cultural identity.

Index Terms- Representations, social relationships, digital communities, X (Twitter).

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern technological advancements have brought about a significant shift across various aspects of life—most notably in the social and cultural spheres. Among the key concepts that have emerged is that of the **digital society**, which has enabled

seamless communication and connection between individuals and groups. This is made possible by features such as unlimited capacity and the removal of geographical boundaries, allowing for the rapid and direct exchange of ideas and information.

Digital societies have also created a new framework for social interactions, moving beyond the nature of traditional social relationships. They now serve as dynamic spaces for the production of cultural meanings that both shape and reflect individual consciousness. Furthermore, they hold the power to influence public awareness across multiple areas of life, acting as channels for the transmission, dissemination, and reproduction of culture.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

We live today in an interconnected, networked world—woven together like a complex fabric. In this world, superiority is no longer measured by building closed-off fortresses, but rather by the density of presence within electronic networks that cross continents and penetrate geographic, demographic, religious, cultural, economic, and political boundaries (Al-Rifai, 2024).

Human civilization also compels individuals to communicate and build their own world of social and cultural relationships. When such relationships are formed in the human realm, culture—reflected in ideas, opinions, and beliefs—acts as the vessel carrying these relationships (Al-Dukkan, 2014). Viewing culture in close relation to social structure reveals that culture is no longer merely a set of abstract norms and values. Instead, it involves dynamic interaction between social classes, institutions, state apparatuses, and value systems, often shaped and reproduced through the networks in which they operate (Peter Berger, Foucault, and Habermas, 2008).

Sociologists see mass interaction in the modern age as a social phenomenon that contributes to societal cohesion and the formation of social relationships. This highlights the fact that human society is built on a web of relationships rooted in interaction. **Digital interaction** is a social process that occurs remotely between parties who exchange roles in broadcasting and receiving various forms of interaction through digital systems and tools, with specific goals in mind. It goes beyond traditional human interaction by including relationships not only among the participants themselves but also among the

components of the digital systems that sustain and evolve the interaction (Abdelmajid, 2007).

Digital communities focus on leveraging modern technology and digitizing content—an effort that brings both positive and negative repercussions for individuals and society at large. Digitized communication between people leads to the digitization of both culture and society. Despite the advantages of speed and ease offered by technology-based communication, it introduces negative consequences such as the “relocation” of individuals into virtual spaces. This shift contributes to transforming contemporary culture into a virtual one, leading to what has been called a **culture of forgetting**, where there is a break in the continuity of individuals’ roles in preserving traditional cultural values acquired from their communities (Decision Center for Media Studies, 2021).

Social media platforms—including **Platform X**—are significant in that they provide broad opportunities for individuals to express themselves and share their feelings and ideas with others (Al-Shaer, 2015), as well as to showcase their cultural identities. These platforms offer tools to build social relationships and interact with others, including forming friendships, joining groups, and following preferred accounts such as friends and family on Facebook, X, and Instagram.

Platform X (formerly Twitter) has contributed not only to enhancing communication between people but also to transforming the very nature of interaction. Its impact goes beyond interpersonal communication to include the dissemination of a new cultural model through its features, particularly the reach of its posts via **AI-driven algorithms**, which make it easier for users with similar interests to encounter specific content. What sets Platform X apart is its ability to foster public interaction around various societal issues—whether through trending hashtags, high-follower accounts, or viral posts touching on topics of community concern, often reaching over a million views.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the representations of social relationships within the Saudi digital society on Platform X.
2. To observe how individuals interact with posts related to social relationships within the Saudi digital society on Platform X.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the representations of the marriage system and the transformations it has undergone in the Saudi digital society? How do individuals engage with them?
2. What are the representations of gender in the Saudi digital society? How do individuals engage with them?
3. What are the representations of social stereotyping and its methods in the Saudi digital society? How do individuals engage with them?

According to **Statista**, Platform X is the most widely used platform in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom ranks **ninth globally** in the number of users—following the United States, Japan, India, Brazil, Indonesia, the UK, Turkey, and ahead of Mexico (Statista, 2023). It is also the **only Arab country** among the global top ten users. Statista further reports that Twitter had 11 million users in Saudi Arabia in 2018, rising to nearly 13 million in 2023, with projections reaching **15 million users by 2027** (Statista, 2023).

This study is informed by the conceptual framework of **social representations theory**, as proposed by Serge Moscovici. This theoretical approach enables a deeper understanding of individuals and groups by analysing how they represent and interpret the world around them. It assumes that representations—whether individual or collective—are never neutral, but are formed through a complex process of meaning-making influenced by cultural references, personal experiences, and social norms. These are closely tied to socialization, language, emotions, and feelings (Al-Sadiq, 2012).

This research adopts a **digital ethnography** methodology, which is “a way of interrogating community behavior within digital spaces. It includes ethnographic research on social media” (Satveer & Mohan, 2017, p. 1). The goal of ethnography is to fully express the cultural membership of a community, considering culture to be a central contributor in any ethnographic inquiry (Satveer & Mohan, 2017).

Based on this foundation, the current study seeks to explore the **representations of social relationships in the digital community of Platform X**, using digital ethnography to analyse a set of posts and social interactions. The research is grounded in the belief that online communities can play a role in cultural production through these digital interactions.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- The importance of this study stems from its timing, coinciding with the widespread use of social media platforms in individuals' daily lives.
- It contributes to understanding the shifts in communication patterns among individuals within the digital community of *Platform X*, as well as the transformation of the concept of “community” itself—from being location-based to becoming a digital construct shaped by shared interests and preferences.
- This study also offers insight into the cultural discourse surrounding social relationships in the Saudi digital society, particularly as *Platform X* stands out as one of the key platforms where public debates occur through the exchange of opinions and responses on social relationship issues.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

Study 1: Al-Harbi (2024) – *"Methods of Interaction Among Saudi Twitter Users Regarding Entertainment and Serious Issues"*

This study aimed to examine and analyze hundreds of thousands of tweets using artificial intelligence tools and natural language processing (NLP) to explore how Saudi users interact with various topics on Twitter. It analyzed the most frequently used words, sentiment trends, and the extent to which users relied on emojis and external links. The study interpreted findings through the lens of **Social Presence Theory**, which focuses on how individuals express themselves in digital environments. Twitter (now Platform X) users were categorized based on follower count into regular users, influencers, and celebrities. The research focused on the three most trending hashtags in Saudi Arabia during the year 1443 AH. Results showed that the higher a user's follower count, the more neutral their language tended to be. Conversely, accounts with fewer followers relied more on sharing external links. The researcher emphasized the importance of further developing AI-based tools to analyze social media data in order to better understand audience behavior, motivations, and trends (Al-Harbi, 2024).

Study 2: Wu & Di (2018) – *"Emotional Branding on Social Media: A Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis of Global Brands on Twitter and Weibo"*

This study investigated the emotional discourse practices of global brands on two major social media platforms—Twitter in the U.S. and Weibo in China—aiming to better understand the nature of language, virtual culture, and underlying ideologies. It focused on two key questions:

1. What are the common and differing discourse themes used by global brands on Twitter vs. Weibo?
2. What are the common and differing interactive rituals and strategies adopted by global brands on both platforms?

The study used **thematic** and **interactive analysis** methods. Thematic analysis examined the nature of brand posts (pragmatic, promotional, sensory), while interactive analysis focused on how companies built solidarity with followers and reduced psychological distance through greetings, visual/verbal cues, and messaging. The sample included posts from 9 out of the top 10 global brands (excluding Apple, which had no official accounts) such as Google, Microsoft, IBM, Coca-Cola, GE, McDonald's, Intel, Samsung, and BMW, over one month (1–30 September 2014). Findings showed more similarities than differences in the discourse themes across Twitter and Weibo. Both platforms used similar emoticon strategies. However, Weibo posts tended to include more emojis, emotionally charged headlines, and casual "small talk," marking a departure from traditionally formal and polite norms of Chinese interpersonal communication (Wu & Di, 2018).

Study 3: Acar & Deguchi (2013) – *"Culture and Social Media Use: An Analysis of Japanese Twitter Users"*

As one of the world's most popular microblogging platforms, Twitter had yet to be studied from a cultural perspective. To address this gap and promote cross-cultural understanding, this study analyzed 4,000 tweets from 200 university students in Japan and the United States.

Findings revealed that Japanese students posted more self-referential messages and asked fewer questions compared to their American counterparts. Tweets referring to television were more common in Japan, while tweets about sports and news were more prominent in the U.S.

The study highlighted a nuanced and complex relationship between **culture and Twitter use**, emphasizing how national and cultural contexts shape digital communication behaviors (Deguchi & Acar, 2013).

VII. RESEARCH CONCEPTS

VII.I The Concept of Representations:

Moscovici defines *representation* as "a system of values, concepts, and behaviors linked to characteristics and themes shaped by the social environment. These do not only enable stability in the lives of individuals and groups but also serve as cognitive frameworks for interpreting situations and forming responses to posed questions" (Boulkhras & Azizi, 2020, p. 28). Representation is always connected to a particular subject and offers a specific interpretation of it based on the information and social influences surrounding that subject (Boulkhras & Azizi, 2020). Representations are also seen as one of the mechanisms that help individuals adapt and connect with their reference group. As such, some representations commonly circulated through the media may serve as a means of linking individuals to their social group (Ouzi, 2006, p. 113).

The relationship between *representation* and *discourse* is neither one of synonymy nor contradiction. Rather, representations manifest through discourse, which consists of socially constructed ideas, beliefs, and symbols that are circulated within a culture and shape how people perceive aspects of the social world (Back et al., 2019, p. 17). *Cultural discourse* refers to the ways individuals communicate with one another and how these communication practices affect all areas of life related to the participants. Everything we say has an echoing effect on those within earshot; everything we write influences its readers; and everything we publish multiplies its reach. Meanwhile, representation is an implicit structure that requires analysis of its components and interaction patterns to uncover embedded meanings. Representations encompass a variety of discourses that express individuals and their communities and appear through their interactions.

VII.II The Concept of Social Relationships:

Social relationships refer to "individuals' responses in all types of mutual interaction attempts. They are recurring, expected behaviors that occur between two people, where each affects and is affected by the other" (El-Sayed, 1980, p. 110). These are

connections that emerge from social interaction (Owais & Helaly, 1988, p. 302).

Social relationships are defined as “a connection between two or more individuals based on attraction and choice, or on rejection and aversion” (Zahran, 1977, p. 74). Others describe relationships as “the channel of communication between individuals, an ambassador between them, or the architecture of mutual social bonds” (El-Sayed, 1980, p. 9). They represent a model of mutual interaction that persists over time, leading to stable social expectations. Reciprocal role relationships between individuals or within institutions are examples of social relationships. These interactions result in mutual influence and behavior between two or more individuals (Al-Eid & Al-Eid, 2020, p. 656).

They can also be defined as “a perceived image of social interaction between two or more parties, where each develops a mental image of the other, which positively or negatively influences their judgments of each other.” Such relationships include friendship, family ties, kinship, work relationships, acquaintances, and even isolation (Amin, 2016, p. 109).

More broadly, social relationships are the mutual bonds and effects that arise among individuals in a society as a result of their gathering, emotional exchanges, and interactions. These relationships—whether positive or negative—are considered essential to life (Abdo, 2013).

VII.III The Concept of Digital Society:

A *digital society* is defined as “a society of rapid change and development in the rhythms of daily life. It is a society of abundant information, with diverse and multifaceted relationships and indirect communications. It is a borderless society, where data and information are easily accessible, accurate, and quickly disseminated” (Al-Sirougi, 2013, p. 233).

VI.IV The Concept of Platform X:

Platform X is a service used by friends, family, and colleagues to stay in touch by sharing brief, frequent messages. These messages—called “tweets”—may include text, images, videos, or links. Users post tweets to their profiles and share them with followers (X, 2023).

The value of microblogging lies in several features: its strength in connecting people, making it a powerful social network; its support for tagging content with hashtags (#) to make posts easier to retrieve and spread; and its ability to collect and archive all messages on a specific topic in one place for public access at any time. Other notable features include displaying view counts for posts and enabling users to join *X Communities*—groups centered around shared interests, where users can publish posts and participate in focused discussions on specific topics.

VIII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given the analytical and qualitative nature of this research, and its aim to explore representations of cultural discourse within the digital society of Platform X, the study adopts the **digital ethnography** approach. This is one of the most widely used methodologies in qualitative research. It is defined as “a method of descriptive studies of cultures and individuals through the description, analysis, and interpretation of a community’s or group’s culture. It focuses on their beliefs and lifestyles and seeks to understand their perceptions” (Qandilji & Al-Samarrai, 2008, p. 22). This methodology includes the study of social behaviors and practices, and revolves around understanding people as meaning-makers, emphasizing how they interpret their worlds and the unique cultural spaces they live in and co-create (Levy & Pepper, 2011).

Ethnographic studies in virtual spaces “enable the collection of data on behaviors, beliefs, cultural representations, motivations, and interpretations derived from virtual realities formed through digital communicative interactions among individuals and groups” (Bouzeer, 2022).

Digital ethnography offers flexibility in responding to evolving digital phenomena and is a method for critically examining cultural life and its representations on digital platforms (Satveer & Mohan, 2017). It seeks to develop a deep understanding of how individuals from different cultural backgrounds perceive and live their realities by providing a thick description of the social context (Levy & Pepper, 2011, p. 460). This methodology recognizes online communities as sites of cultural production through digital interactions (Clifford J., 1997).

Unlike traditional communication models that focused on message components in isolation, digital ethnography takes into account the **cultural, social, economic, and technological contexts** that shape digital communication (Bouzeer, 2022).

VIII.I Research Population:

The research population includes all posts from the digital community on *Platform X* within the geographical scope of Saudi Arabia, published between 2023 and 2025.

VIII.II Research Sample:

The study employed **purposive sampling**, where the units are intentionally selected based on the researcher’s judgment that they will yield meaningful results (Al-Baldawi, 2007, p. 75).

Posts were selected from *Platform X* according to the following criteria:

1. Each post must have received **at least one million views**.

- The post must originate from a user account located within **Saudi Arabia**, verified by the location icon on the user's profile or a location stated in their content.
- The post must be **related to social relationships**.

Data collection was stopped once **data saturation** was reached. In qualitative research, saturation occurs when new data no longer reveals additional insights or themes. Researchers diversify samples to address emerging concepts during analysis, and once repetitive patterns appear, further data collection is no longer necessary (Lisa et al., 2008, p. 540).

VIII.III Research Tool:

The study relied on **qualitative content analysis** to examine posts about social relationships, aiming to uncover the cultural and social representations shaped through digital discourse.

Content analysis is not merely a close reading of texts—it also involves the researcher's analytical and theoretical abilities to connect variables and interpret meaning (Hamza, 2011). As a research tool, qualitative content analysis is widely used in case studies and ethnographic research. It breaks down texts and documents to examine their deeper meanings and is considered a practical application of higher-order thinking skills—particularly analysis (Al-Rashidi, 2021).

VIII.IV Research Boundaries:

VIII.IV.I Thematic Boundaries:

The study is limited to analyzing posts related to **social relationships** on *Platform X*.

VIII.IV.II Spatial Boundaries:

The research is limited to posts **originating within Saudi Arabia**. This was verified in two ways:

- From the location icon shown in the user's profile.
- Or by the user stating their geographical location in one of their posts.

VIII.IV.III Temporal Boundaries:

The study only includes posts published in **2024 and 2025** related to social relationships.

This research analyzed the content of **15 posts**, manually collected from *Platform X* (formerly Twitter). The data was coded using **inductive coding**, which draws themes directly from the data without relying on pre-existing frameworks or theoretical categories. This approach minimizes theoretical bias and enriches the analysis with depth and flexibility.

Coding and data organization were carried out using **MAXQDA**, a software that facilitates content management and pattern recognition in qualitative analysis.

The selected posts all had over **one million views** and were published by accounts active within Saudi Arabia. In addition to the main posts, the study analyzed **key replies** as classified by Platform X under “most relevant replies,” as these reflect important social representations and interactions within the Saudi digital community.



Figure 1 presents a visual map of the first-stage coding outcomes generated through MAXQDA.

IX. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an analysis of how social relationships are represented in the Saudi digital society, based on data collected from Platform X. The findings are organized into three main themes, each comprising several subthemes. Together, they shed light on the ways in which social relationships are represented in the Saudi digital context. These themes include: (1) the institution of marriage and its transformations, (2) gender representations, and (3) mechanisms of social stereotyping as manifested in digital society.

IX.I Representations of the Marriage System and Its Transformations in Saudi Society:

Today, individuals increasingly turn to technology both to form and to shield themselves from social relationships. This trend stems from feelings of insecurity and concerns about the sustainability of such relationships. In this context, Sherry Turkle (2012) introduced the concept of “second life” as a key manifestation of social interaction in digital societies. This refers to how individuals do not use digital interaction for superficial purposes but instead reshape their identities and form relationships that may, in some cases, be more stable and fulfilling than those in the physical world.

Turkle describes this digital identity as “a perpetual draft,” where a person is attached to a flexible, multi-faceted identity that appears differently across platforms and digital contexts. She also notes that this second life may serve as a means of escaping one's real self or as a way to experiment with relationships without genuine commitments. However, she warns that over-

immersion in digital communities can erode people's ability to build authentic relationships, as they come to prefer the control and distance offered by online interaction over the emotional presence required in real-life connections (Turkle, 2012).

This perspective shows that digital relationships are not merely an extension of reality but can constitute a parallel reality with its own rules and deep psychological and social effects—warranting study as a new cultural model for understanding human relationships in the digital age.

The subtheme “Representations of the Marriage System and Its Transformations in the Saudi Digital Society” includes several focal areas: the rise of individualism and the rejection of traditional marriage, representations of marital conflict and its impact on privacy, women's negotiation with patriarchy, emotional criteria in marriage decisions, and the phenomenon of superficial marriage culture.

IX.1.1 Representations of Individualism and the Rejection of Traditional Family Formation:

Individualism in contemporary society is reflected in the emphasis on self-actualization and autonomous decision-making, independent of group expectations and traditions. Personal desires have become a priority, with individuals freely expressing their views and lifestyles. Personal achievement is often glorified over collective success, particularly under modern values such as freedom, independence, and self-development.

While individualism grants freedom, it may also lead to social isolation and weakened bonds, making it a double-edged phenomenon in today's societies. The following post clearly reflects this notion:

"(Speaking here about myself)

I'm 35 and never thought about marriage for several reasons:

- I don't want my mother to choose someone for me (traditional marriage).
- I don't want to get married just because people expect it.
- I don't want to have kids just to fulfill my parents' wishes to see grandchildren.
- I don't want to be a father in name only and leave parenting to the mother or raise kids just so they can serve me!!
There are fathers whose kids don't love them, and mothers who hate their children, and many, many more!!
We don't need to get married if we haven't yet built our personalities and aren't ready to form a family free of chaos.
Note: traditional marriage is still the easiest option in our society."

Posted on December 5, 2024, this tweet garnered over 3 million views. It conveys a critical stance toward prevailing ideas about marriage in Saudi society. The author opposes dominant societal norms and traditional expectations, which often pressure individuals into socially accepted roles without genuine personal conviction. The post critiques common motivations for marriage—such as pleasing parents or conforming to societal expectations—and frames family and community as forces that undermine individual autonomy.

Instead, it promotes a more self-aware model, where the decision to marry is based on personal maturity and readiness for real responsibility. The line “We don't need to get married if we haven't yet built our personalities” strongly reflects an individualistic stance, and the author's outright rejection of traditional matchmaking (“I don't want my mother to choose someone for me”) centers decision-making on the self rather than the collective.

This shift in how familial authority and personal choice are represented is supported by Al-Saif (2019), who noted a disconnect in earlier Saudi society between the means (marriage) and the goal (emotional and sexual fulfillment). This mismatch resulted in what sociology terms “ritualistic marriage”: unions that fail to meet emotional and physical needs due to societal constraints on marriage. As a result, many individuals find themselves in unsatisfying marriages, which leads to a breeding ground for familial issues.

Al-Saif also explained that marriages in previous generations were shaped by collective family values and driven by the aspirations of elders. In contrast, today's youth tend to approach marriage with a sense of independence and expectations that differ greatly from those of their parents, which has contributed to rising divorce rates in Saudi society.

Moreover, the tweet highlights one specific representation of rejecting traditional family formation: irresponsible fatherhood. The author's words—

"I don't want to be a father in name only and leave parenting to the mother or raise kids just so they can serve me!!
There are fathers whose kids don't love them, and mothers who hate their children, and many, many more!!"

—reveal the fragility of parental roles that are often performed superficially, without genuine emotional or educational engagement. It critiques the unequal burden placed on mothers and questions the assumption that family relationships are inherently loving or nurturing.

In doing so, the post destabilizes the idealized image of the family as an unconditionally supportive unit and offers a deeper, more critical reflection on the emotional and moral responsibilities of forming a family in today's world.

Building a family should not be merely a response to social pressure, but rather a conscious decision stemming from the individual's ability to achieve psychological and social stability. This calls for a new concept of the family—not as a social obligation, but as a project grounded in awareness, compatibility, and modern parenting practices. This view was reflected in the following post:

"We don't have to get married if we haven't built our personalities independently and can't create a family free of chaos."

This individual discourse represents a new perception of marriage in traditional societies. It questions the social motives behind marriage and reveals a shift in the value system that governs family formation.

A response to this post introduces a more ambivalent perspective—torn between idealism and realism:

"You're absolutely right, but until when...? Let's say this idea is 100% idealistic. But if I don't marry traditionally, where will I find someone? And if I follow this thinking, I'll reach 40 or 45 still searching, and there'll be a big age gap between me and my kids."

Though the comment opens with agreement—"You're absolutely right"—it quickly reintroduces the same social anxieties that govern the marriage decision. It raises a core question emerging with the rise of individualism: Is personal independence and a desire for non-traditional marriage worth the risk of missing the opportunity to marry? Especially given the weak alternatives for meeting potential spouses outside traditional routes. The commenter expresses concern about the practical consequences of rejecting traditional marriage, such as aging alone or being unable to relate to one's children. These concerns are often used to justify returning to conventional choices—out of fear of loneliness, lost opportunities, or generational gaps.

This kind of discourse reveals that social structures have not changed at the same pace as cultural shifts. It captures the tension experienced by the new generation—torn between personal convictions and the social frameworks that continue to exert implicit pressure on life decisions.

These shifts in personal discourse around marriage and fatherhood reflect a growing form of digital individualism in Saudi society. This is particularly evident in open expressions of personal critiques against traditional values on platforms like X. While marriage decisions in previous decades were largely dictated by family will and social customs, today they are seen as personal choices. Digital platforms—especially for youth—offer spaces free from direct surveillance, where inherited values can be deconstructed and reimagined through an independent lens.

This discourse aligns with what contemporary sociology calls *the rise of individualism*—a cultural shift where the locus of meaning and decision-making moves from the collective (family, society, tradition) to the individual. In this context, marriage is no longer seen as a societal necessity dictated by age or custom, but as an optional project, conditional on the individual's maturity and capacity for commitment. This reflects Giddens'

idea of individualism, where life choices are shaped by personal awareness rather than imposed norms (Giddens, 1992). The speaker isn't rejecting marriage per se, but is reconfiguring the concepts of fatherhood and family around self-defined conditions—such as being capable of forming a non-chaotic relationship—thus transforming marriage into a choice, not an obligation.

This also parallels Bauman's notion of *liquid modernity*, in which social ties become temporary and negotiable. The family is no longer a fixed or sacred institution, but a flexible option continually re-evaluated by the individual (Bauman, 2012).

IX.I.II Representations of Marital Conflict in the Digital Society: Threats to Privacy and Redefining Intimacy

The rapid digital transformation has reshaped how self-expression and social relationships are represented. Private matters are no longer discussed in closed circles—instead, personal conflicts, including marital disputes, are now aired publicly on platforms like X. This shift directly challenges the concept of family privacy in the Saudi digital space and reflects deeper changes in how marriage and conflict are socially understood.

Publishing marital disputes online, and the interactions they spark, show how the digital audience becomes entangled in intimate relationships—turning them into “public events” shaped by non-expert commentary and unsolicited advice. The following post illustrates this:

"I fought with my husband, and we're on the brink of divorce. He insulted me, and I told him to look at himself first. He said the only thing that matters in a man is his wallet. I said: well, you've got no wallet, no looks, no manners—nothing worth staying for. I stormed off and he left to work upset."

This post, published on June 18, 2025, and viewed over 2.6 million times, reflects complex social representations of marital conflict. It encapsulates the intersections of gender roles, personal emotions, and public space in a single moment—undermining privacy and reducing the chances for peaceful resolution.

While social media enables communication across boundaries, it has also eroded privacy. It encourages individuals to continuously share personal information, blurring the line between private and public life. Technology has enabled people to broadcast their most intimate experiences in exchange for attention in the digital spotlight (Bauman & Donskis, 2018). This observation underscores how communication technologies dig deeply into our lives.

Moreover, sharing such experiences on a public platform like X has turned the digital society into an alternative medium for recognition and emotional release. The text functions as a form of digital confession. This aligns with Foucault's (1976) concept

of confession—not as a free expression, but as a tool of self-regulation. In modern contexts, confession becomes a means of seeking validation, empathy, or shaping one's social identity according to audience expectations. This signals a collapse of the boundary between public and private life, an issue digital media theorists warn against as a sign of self-regulatory disturbance in the digital age (Turkle, 2012).

The post also illustrates a dismissal of the spouse's worth with the phrase "nothing worth staying for," highlighting emotional escalation and deteriorating communication. It reveals a collapse of emotional capital within the relationship—where blame becomes the only mode of exchange.

This post transforms a private marriage issue into a public spectacle that draws sympathy or attack. One comment reads: *"Most of the girls arguing in the replies are teens or clueless girls who don't know what marriage means. They want their husbands to treat them like queens while being their servants. If you get divorced, let's see if your pride and all this talk will help you—no one marries a divorcee anymore. You'll end up stuck at your parents' house."*

This reply reflects a shallow, misogynistic stance attacking women who critique marriage norms. It reinforces a stereotype against divorced women, portraying marriage as a harsh reality that must be accepted without question and placing full blame on women.

Another reply highlights gender-based double standards in digital interaction:

"The guys in the comments are mad and saying it's sad we've reached this state. If the one complaining were a man, everyone would have supported him and told him to divorce and remarry!" Men's complaints are often met with empathy, while women's are met with blame—revealing a gender bias in public reactions.

Many responses also reflect the symbolic use of religious authority in Saudi digital culture. One example:

"It's not permissible for a wife to talk back to her husband in anger unless she wants to..."

This statement invokes an implicit religious authority without citing scripture, using the phrase "*not permissible*" as both religious and moral judgment. It holds the woman solely responsible for managing conflict, even when mistreated, and expects her to stay silent and submissive to avoid religious transgression. This selective invocation of religious discourse reinforces hierarchical gender roles. As Hisham Sharabi (1993) describes in his concept of *patriarchalism*, religious authority is used to condemn women and justify male behavior, sustaining female subordination as a moral duty. He argues that true civilizational critique must move beyond patriarchal frames and adopt alternative language to challenge dominant ideologies. Zayed (2017) also notes that religious discourse operates as symbolic power due to its perceived sacredness, making it an unchallengeable force used to reproduce the existing social order in the name of the absolute.

In this sense, religion can shift from a spiritual system to a symbolic tool for regulating behavior within unequal relationships. On open platforms like X, such discourse spreads widely because it presents itself as a moral and religious authority—even when it doesn't reflect a balanced understanding of religious texts.

This echoes Bourdieu's view that symbolic power is a form of influence that people are unaware they are subjected to—it is only effective when recognized by those over whom it is exercised (Bourdieu, 1991). Religious symbolic power is a clear example: institutions or figures use their influence to impose selective interpretations of sacred texts as ultimate truths, which people accept unquestioningly.

Another rational reply condemned the wife's public disclosure, viewing it as a betrayal of the husband's dignity and a threat to marital privacy:

"Respect between spouses is essential—without it, the marriage is doomed. You insulted him while he was away and posted about it on Twitter! That's shocking."

On the other hand, another response criticized male insecurity:

"When a husband feels his wife is more intelligent, beautiful, or educated, he often tries to bring her down—insinuating that her looks aren't enough or making her feel stupid. He does this to break her confidence and make her feel inferior. Don't be sad—if he started the insults, he's just insecure."

This comment shows psychological insight into the behaviors of some men who try to undermine empowered women, and it ends with a supportive message for the woman.

This interaction among members of the Saudi digital community leads us to a clear conclusion: the use of harsh and aggressive language in posts directly impacts the tone of audience comments, making their responses emotional and intense. This reveals the influence of language in shaping the overall interaction.

We now move to another source of marital conflict in Saudi society: the phenomenon of a lack of independence from the extended family on both sides of the couple. The following post and the reactions to it on the Saudi digital community illustrate this:

"Girls, I swear I'm going to explode, I've had enough! I asked him to contribute to renting a chalet for Eid, and he said, 'I've already paid for my family's chalet. If you want to come, fine. As for your family's chalet, I won't pay a single riyal. I swear I'll block you.'"

This post, published on 6/6/2025 and viewed 1.8 million times, reflects a significant amount of negative emotion compressed into a short phrase. The husband's response, "*I've already paid for my family's chalet. If you want to come, fine*", suggests that their marital relationship is built around a "my family/your family" dichotomy, indicating the absence of a sense of shared partnership. This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence*, where domination is not expressed through physical harm or direct insult, but through rational language that conceals

a lack of recognition for mutual feelings and rights (Bourdieu, 1994). The wife's phrase, *"I swear I'll block you,"* shows that her anger has escalated to the point of wanting to cut off communication, stemming from her perception of her husband's lack of appreciation—and her lack of concern for the privacy of the marital unit by publicizing their conflict in the digital community.

Some of the responses to the post reflect the perception of the wife's rights within Saudi digital society, highlighting the husband's financial responsibilities independent of his extended family. One comment states:

"The comments don't make sense. How is this not his responsibility? She's his wife—he should pay for her and make her happy, and for their children too, whether he attends or not. Ever since I've known, it's the man who contributes financially, whether it's for his family or hers."

This reflects the idea that financial contributions are considered an integral part of masculinity, and the man is expected to pay regardless of the circumstances.

Another response illustrates the belief that the husband is financially responsible for his wife, even if she is employed:

"Despite the awareness today, there are still some ignorant girls who don't know the wife's rights. Most of the comments say, 'If you're employed, you don't need it!' What nonsense is this? Even if I'm employed and earn 20,000, he still has to pay. You're the ones teaching them to stop taking responsibility for anything just because the woman has a job. Then you'll complain they don't provide anything."

This comment criticizes those who believe a husband's financial duties can be dismissed if his wife has her own income. It argues that the husband remains primarily responsible for financial matters concerning his wife and children, and blames some women for allowing men to evade these responsibilities. The colloquial, sarcastic tone—using words like “ignorant girls”—shows how real and relatable these conflicts are in everyday Saudi life.

Another response reflects a deeply rooted social custom in Arab culture, where male relatives of the woman (e.g., brothers or father) are expected to handle such expenses:

"It's always the brothers and father who pay for contributions. In our customs, the sisters' husbands are considered guests in your family. How can your husband be expected to pay along with them?"

This old tradition is still present among many in Saudi society, where a woman's husband is viewed as a guest and not expected to contribute to her family's expenses.

We can conclude that a simple financial matter, such as contributing to an event, opens the door to significant debates about the roles of husband and wife in financial responsibilities—making it a key point of conflict in many modern Saudi marriages.

A third post also highlights marital conflict as it appears on X:

"Girls, be fair to me. My husband and I booked a trip to a

European country, and this country is known for its racism towards Muslim women. I bought colourful, modest clothes, but he refused and said he would cancel the tickets if I didn't wear black. The problem is that I paid half the travel expenses, so he has no right to cancel without my permission just to pressure me into wearing something I don't want to!"

Published on 16/6/2025 and viewed 1.4 million times, this post underscores the clash of wills between husband and wife within a relationship marked by *power and control*, as the husband attempts to enforce his authority by threatening to cancel the trip despite the wife's financial contribution. This reveals an unequal power dynamic.

This post also reflects the evolving nature of marital disputes in Saudi society as they appear on X. Cultural changes in recent years have led women to assert their own sense of style, choosing colourful yet modest clothing instead of exclusively black attire. This difference in mindset between husband and wife leads to everyday conflicts that disrupt marital harmony.

Like the previous posts, this one highlights a significant shift in how people express their marital conflicts. Social media platforms have become spaces for public disclosure and seeking social support, despite the risks of losing privacy. This shift signals a transformation in modern human relationships, particularly within the Saudi digital community.

Publishing private marital conflicts invites emotionally charged reactions from digital audiences—most of whom have no knowledge of the full context and are unqualified to offer marital advice. Some of the responses even encourage separation or divorce, as seen in these replies:

"Let him cancel the trip, take your money back, add to it, and travel with your family. Or tell him, fine, I'll wear a black abaya, but you'll only wear a thobe and headscarf—let's see what he says."

"Travel with your friends. He has no right to control you—what a sick man."

"I don't know what you want us to say—it's obvious. File for divorce without hesitation, and thank God you don't have kids with him."

"Every day I'm more convinced that marrying a Saudi man is the biggest mistake."

"Tell him you'll wear black only if he wears a thobe and headscarf, and if he refuses, cancel the trip and demand your money back."

These replies use reverse sarcasm and harsh tones, encouraging the wife to resist her husband by demanding that he conform to the same “traditions” he imposes on her. One reply calls him “sick,” escalating the hostility and undermining the marital bond. This reflects a growing trend in digital communities—encouraging women to sever ties entirely, framing divorce as an act of empowerment, while ignoring the complexity of marital relationships.

One of the harshest replies is:

"It's obvious—file for divorce without hesitation, and thank God

you don't have kids with him."

This directly advocates ending the marriage without attempting reconciliation or dialogue. Such responses represent what can be called a *discourse of symbolic destruction* of the marital institution, where divorce is portrayed as the ultimate victory for the woman, and the absence of children is considered a stroke of luck.

Another reply—"Every day I'm more convinced that marrying a Saudi man is the biggest mistake"—generalizes an individual problem to an entire demographic, which is a hasty and illogical generalization.

The language used in these responses provides no room for dialogue or conflict resolution. Instead, it completely dismisses any middle ground, leading to the symbolic dismantling of the family institution. While some of these comments aim to support the woman, they reinforce an extreme individualistic approach to managing marital disputes—especially in the digital space, which magnifies issues and makes them public rather than resolving them privately.

IX.II Marriage Through the Lens of Emotions: Does Emotional Fulfillment Damage Marital Relationships?

Emotional fulfillment is a fundamental need in a marriage, as it strengthens stability and communication between spouses. Yet, one question arises: Does a woman's emotional fulfillment pose a threat to the marital relationship? This question has recently circulated on X among members of the Saudi digital community. It opens a discussion about the emotional balance between spouses and how a woman's emotional independence affects the sustainability and success of the relationship. While some view such fulfillment as a sign of emotional maturity and mental health, others see it as a challenge to the husband's traditional role as the primary source of emotional support. This tension merits deeper reflection and analysis, as evident in the following post and its comments:

"The worst thing in life is to marry a woman who's full of love, pampering, and care—because nothing you offer will stand out to her since she's already used to it."

This post, published on 19/4/2025 and viewed 1.5 million times, highlights a problem within the marital structure: marriage is often not seen as a partnership for mutual emotional giving. If a woman is already emotionally fulfilled from her family before marriage, her husband's gestures may fail to feel significant or unique, leading to a lack of appreciation or emotional engagement. Conversely, a man—particularly one lacking emotional awareness—may perceive her fulfillment as diminishing his value or ability to satisfy her, weakening his efforts. From his perspective, a woman must have emotional needs for her to appreciate and value his contributions.

In such circumstances, a man may feel like an "invisible giver," especially if the woman subconsciously compares what she received from her family to what she receives from her husband.

This can lead to frustration and a drop in self-confidence. Often, men do not openly express such feelings, which further complicates the issue.

If we were to question these cultural perceptions of emotional roles within marriage as circulated in the Saudi digital society—and the extent to which previous family experiences affect emotional needs within a new relationship—we would find that their roots often stem from issues within the upbringing system. Specifically, in cases where the mother—especially a dependent mother—has a possessive relationship with her son, this leads to emotional immaturity and a lack of awareness of his role within a marital relationship. This is clarified by Higazi (2022), who states that the woman is the most wronged and oppressed being, and that the man, who is himself oppressed, denies this oppression and avoids confronting or becoming aware of it by reversing roles in his relationship with the woman. He assumes the role of the dominant master and imposes upon her the subordinate role, projecting his psychological shortcomings onto her and attributing them to femininity and its natural characteristics. In turn, she resorts to various defensive mechanisms to confront her dilemma. If the man possesses the woman in a relationship of control and subjugation, she compensates for this by possessing the children. By inflating the value of motherhood, the value of the child is likewise inflated—but as something the mother owns, as a part of her being. This leads to a possessive relationship, where the child ultimately pays the price of compensating the mother for the injustices she has suffered from society. The more she sacrifices for motherhood, the more she demands the child to become something she owns emotionally and devotes her attention to. Thus, it is rare for the boy to become emotionally independent from his mother (Higazi, 2022). This, in turn, causes a clear lack of maturity and emotional development in his personality, affecting his future relationships with his wife and daughters.

This suggests that many men are raised with emotional suppression and relative deprivation of affection, which leaves them yearning to give or receive affection in marriage. The disparity between a woman's emotional fulfillment and a man's emotional deprivation may create a gap that is hard to bridge without mutual awareness. It is therefore crucial for both spouses to recognize the differences between each partner's emotional past and their shared emotional present.

However, this does not mean that emotional fulfillment is negative in itself; the real issue lies in the absence of emotional awareness. If a woman is aware that she received a great deal of love in her upbringing, this should help her give love in her new relationship. Likewise, a man should not perceive her previous emotional abundance as a threat, but rather strive to build a conscious emotional bond. This requires the development of emotional intelligence in both partners before marriage.

We now present a selection of public reactions from the Saudi digital society to the post, with sociological analysis:

“This is natural and reflects a secure attachment style. You’re projecting your own feelings—thinking you’re not enough and have nothing to offer—onto the girl. She doesn’t see you that way; you do. On the contrary, when someone chooses to be with you not out of need or dependence, that’s true love.”

This response reflects psychological maturity and refers to the “secure attachment” style. It rejects the notion that emotional fulfillment is a threat and argues that true love is about conscious choice, not need or deficiency. This view aligns with modern relationship theories.

“On the contrary, her eyes are already full—she won’t see you as just a source of compensation. She’ll choose you because she sees you as a complete person, not someone to fill a gap. That’s what healthy relationships are—mutual give and take. The ones afraid of emotionally fulfilled women are those who have nothing to offer but crumbs.”

This comment strongly critiques the utilitarian view of relationships that sees women as needy beings and promotes a modern understanding of mutual care.

“You’re emotionally backward and dumb. No matter how much her family spoiled her, there’s no comparison to a husband’s affection. Relationships are different. I suggest mandatory courses for people like you. Don’t marry unless you’re emotionally educated. Your situation is pathetic.”

“The worst thing in life is to marry someone who looks for flaws just to force themselves on you and exploit your weaknesses.”

Though harsh in tone, both comments reflect an important reality: many men in Arab societies lack emotional awareness due to faulty notions of masculinity instilled during upbringing. One comment classifies such dynamics as toxic relationships where one party exploits the other’s weaknesses for control rather than seeking mutual understanding. It also reinforces the difference between familial and marital emotional support.

“If you end up in this situation, don’t go out of your way to please her. Be yourself—don’t change or pretend. The purpose of marriage is your comfort and happiness. Her role is to please you and seek your satisfaction. If she does that, respond kindly and give her attention—but you must remain the center of the household, not her.”

This comment reveals an imbalanced view of marriage where the relationship revolves around the man’s comfort and the woman’s efforts to earn his approval—a view increasingly outdated in light of current cultural shifts and the rise in women’s education and awareness. It is not conducive to building a well-rounded family.

“That’s why you need a competitive edge—something her family didn’t give her. Analyze her personality and behavior and find

gaps—things she needs that her family didn’t provide, which you can offer.”

This response takes a competitive approach to relationships, reducing them to strategy rather than human emotional connection.

IX.IV Superficial Marriage Culture: When the Decision Is Reduced to Escaping the Family Home and External Appearances

Amid rapid social changes, marriage culture among a segment of youth has become increasingly shallow, stripping the institution of its deeper meaning. Marriage has in many contemporary representations become a display project or a means to achieve social status, rather than being seen as a human partnership based on mutual understanding and responsibility. This superficiality reflects a distorted perception of commitment and roles within marriage, raising questions about how this affects the quality and stability of marital life. A critical reading of these representations is necessary. Consider the following post:

“Marriage gives you things you can’t have at your parents’ house. For example, a room to yourself. You can sleep and wake up without someone turning on the light over your head or disturbing you. No more sharing a room with your sisters. That’s one of the perks of marriage.”

Published on 17/6/2025 and viewed over 1.6 million times, this post sparked widespread engagement within the Saudi digital community. It reflects a shallow understanding of marriage, focusing on minor benefits such as having a private room or escaping sibling annoyances. It reduces marriage to an upgrade in living conditions, as if it were merely a ticket out of the family home, rather than a mature relationship grounded in communication and shared responsibility.

Such perceptions may result from an upbringing that fails to define marriage as a system built on the ability to manage diverse responsibilities. This kind of thinking highlights the need to reframe young people’s—especially women’s—understanding of marriage: from viewing it as a solution to family problems to understanding it as a human experience that requires self-awareness, communication, and readiness to face life’s challenges as a team.

Another related post, published on 14/4/2025 with over 3.5 million views, was a reply to the following:

Original post: “Twitter girls welcome suitors with coffee and a measuring tape.”

Response post:

"Girls, I've been proposed to by two men. One is a military officer stationed in my city near my family. The other is a neurosurgeon from my city but will be working outside the city for the next eight years. Both are good men with morals and values. The military guy is 175 cm and 28 years old. The doctor is 165 cm and 27 years old. I'm 162 cm and 23 years old. I'm really confused. Being close to my family matters to me."

This post presents a personal dilemma where a young woman must choose between two suitors. Her criteria are largely superficial: height, age, occupation, and proximity to her family. This simplifies the concept of marriage into a checklist of external factors, neglecting crucial elements such as emotional compatibility and shared values. The decision-making reflects a consumerist approach to a life-altering commitment.

The community responded to the post with sarcasm, including cartoon images showing the bride offering the suitor Saudi coffee and dates while holding a measuring tape to assess his height. (Visual Illustration 2)



Sarcasm and satire are among the most prominent forms of cultural expression on the Saudi digital platform X. Users employ humor and criticism to vent or to reframe social and cultural realities in an accessible, shareable format.

IX.II Gender Representations in the Saudi Digital Society

In the Saudi digital society, new and complex meanings and representations of gender have emerged. Stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity are being reproduced, challenged, and reimaged. This section analyzes three sub-themes: (1) Representations of femininity between social practice and individual resistance; (2) Societal stereotypes about masculinity and male reactions to feminist discourse; and (3) Women's negotiations with patriarchy.

IX.II.1 Representations of Femininity between Social Practice and Individual Resistance

In the context of rapid social and cultural transformations, representations of femininity in Arab societies have become a topic of discussion—especially in digital spaces, where

individuals can express themselves freely, away from the direct expectations of society.

Some posts portray femininity as performative, used to gain social acceptance. One such post reads:

"Before I got married, I often heard women advise: *'Pretend to be stupid and act shy.'* But I'm a woman whose eyes spark with intelligence—I couldn't fake stupidity even if I tried. I'm bold and unafraid to say what I want. So, from the first night, I decided to be myself—no pretense, no lies. Weeks later, my husband admitted that what he loved most was my intelligence and boldness, saying they're rare in women. The truth is, these traits aren't rare among women—society just tries to strip them away and bury them under the illusion that they don't belong to femininity."

Posted on 07/02/2025 with 1.8 million views, this post articulates resistance against stereotypical constructs of femininity. It reflects a feminist consciousness that challenges societal prescriptions imposed on women before marriage—such as being submissive or feigning ignorance. These expectations restrict authentic female expression and impose a socially acceptable version of womanhood.

The poster boldly rejects this mold by affirming her natural personality and desire for a marriage built on truth, not performance. Her description—*"a woman whose eyes spark with intelligence"*—serves as both a self-affirmation and symbolic pride in traits traditionally attributed to men, like boldness and intellect. This disrupts the masculine/feminine binary.

This post clearly exemplifies what Judith Butler (1990) terms *"everyday feminism"*—the subtle, daily acts of resistance women perform against gender norms. Butler argues that gender identity (femininity/masculinity) is not innate but performed socially through repeated behaviors and roles—a concept known as *gender performativity*.

The societal pressure on women to act submissively, feign ignorance, or conform to an "acceptable femininity" demonstrates how social structures dictate gender performance. Butler calls for destabilizing such norms and creating space for more authentic expressions of gender identity.

The husband's statement—*"I love your intelligence and boldness"*—symbolically dismantles the cultural claim that these traits repel men, reaffirming the diversity of femininity and the need to deconstruct social authority that defines women as inherently "weak." Many women today no longer accept such roles.

Another response to the post reads:

"Sadly, society tries to portray femininity as childish and silly—especially recently."

That's wrong. These behaviors actually reduce your attractiveness—especially to a life partner—because you can't live forever pretending to be someone else."

This reply expresses an awareness that infantilizing women undermines true connection and authenticity in relationships. It affirms that performative femininity is unsustainable and harmful.

Parents still often raise their children according to outdated notions. Daughters are taught to submit and endure; sons are taught to dominate under the guise of *qiwāma* (guardianship). This gendered upbringing leads to marital instability, as many women eventually resist authoritarian dynamics in marriage (Alsaif, 2019).

Another reply further critiques traditional advice:

"Honestly, they should keep their dumb advice to themselves. It feels like you're going into war, not getting married. A normal person just wants to be on the same side as their partner. You shouldn't have to fake a personality. If someone can't accept you as you are, they're not the right one."

This angry and critical tone reflects a feminist perspective rejecting any role-playing in marriage. It insists on equality and unconditional acceptance as the foundation of emotional stability.

IX.II.II Stereotypical Representations of Masculinity in Society

Society's stereotypical notions of masculinity are a central part of the cultural structures that shape gender roles. These constructs create expectations that men must meet to be seen as "real men." Several viral posts reflect these norms.

One post ties masculinity to financial status:

"I fought with my husband and we were about to divorce. He started mocking me, and I snapped back: *'Look at yourself first.'* He said, *'A man's only flaw is his empty pocket.'* So I replied: *'You're not rich, not good-looking, not kind—nothing about you is worth tolerating.'*"

This post reflects the deeply ingrained belief in Saudi culture that a man's primary worth lies in his wealth. The wife's response reinforces this view, showing how both men and women may internalize and reproduce such stereotypes.

Another post critiques emotional repression as part of the masculine ideal:

"Be patient—you're a man.
Work—you're a man.
Don't cry—you're a man.
Endure pain—you're a man.
Work and slave away with no rest—because you're a man.
May God curse the kind of 'manhood' you believe in."

Posted on 01/05/2025 with 4.7 million views, this post strongly criticizes traditional masculine expectations. The repeated phrase "you're a man" highlights the constant social pressure to suppress emotion and shoulder burdens without complaint. The post reveals the emotional toll this image of manhood takes on men and represents a growing protest against such rigid roles.

These stereotypes not only reinforce male dominance but also limit men's emotional expression, harming their mental health and relationship quality. In traditional societies, these views are often reinforced by religious and social norms, making their deconstruction a complex challenge that requires deep cultural shifts.

IX.II.III Male Reactions to the Feminist Turn in Saudi Digital Society

In recent decades, there has been a notable shift in public discussions around gender issues, coinciding with the rise of feminist discourse in both offline and digital spaces. Many women—especially in Arab societies—have embraced notions of autonomy, empowerment, and the rejection of stereotypes as expressions of their right to redefine their roles within the family and society. Digital platforms, especially "X" (formerly Twitter), have accelerated the circulation and localization of these ideas in accessible, colloquial language. Baraka (2023) affirms that Arab women have used digital spaces to express their views, turning new media into a platform for discussing various feminist ideas and movements.

However, this shift in Saudi digital society has not gone unchallenged. In parallel, there has been a wave of male backlash, often marked by sarcasm, hostility, or direct opposition. These responses attempt to reassert traditional gender norms or reject what is perceived as a transgression of gender boundaries.

Several posts illustrate such representations, including male reactions to women's attempts to strengthen their economic and social presence—often referred to on Platform X as "the feminist trend." One post states:

"The wave of fake independence and entitlement among many girls between 2017 and 2023 has declined drastically—almost vanished. They were shocked by the burdens of responsibility piling up on their backs and realized they were the biggest losers in this battle. Now, there are noticeable concessions among those influenced by feminist thought. This is only natural and expected."

However, this failed feminist trend has sparked a dangerous male reaction, which can be intellectually violent—especially among teenagers and the immature.

We must address this extreme male backlash, resist it, and raise youth awareness of its dangers. Here comes the role of families, schools, and media in promoting correct concepts of each gender's roles and duties, and in fighting Western social ideologies that have proven to be failures, while reasserting our values and religion, which emphasize the family and social roles."

Posted on 2/6/2025, with 3.7 million views, this post reveals a discursive structure portraying male reactions in Saudi digital society. It uses mockery to frame traits like "independence" and "entitlement" as a fleeting trend tied to women's experimentation with feminist ideas—portraying it as a misguided collective impulse that led to disillusionment. The post outlines a narrative arc: the rise of independence, its failure, and a resulting male backlash.

Interestingly, the post does not merely condemn feminism but also critiques the male backlash, describing it as "extreme" and "intellectually violent," particularly among youth. This reflects an awareness of the dangers such counter-discourses pose to social balance. While the post rejects feminism and blames it for moral confusion, it also distances itself from aggressive masculinity, advocating instead a return to traditional values rooted in religion and familial structure. Families, schools, and the media are assigned a central role in "correcting" this perceived imbalance by spreading "proper" gender roles and countering what are labeled "failed Western ideologies."

This indicates that traditional soft power institutions—such as the family, education, and formal media—still frame values, especially in conservative contexts. However, these institutions now compete with more influential forces in shaping public consciousness, including digital communities, influencers, and memes. As Al-Banna, Hashim, and Hammam (2022) note, digitality and the internet have transformed many traditional social structures.

The post frequently uses evaluative terms like "vanished," "shocked," "burdens," and "losers" to describe the feminist experience, while employing cautionary language like "dangerous reaction" and "immature minds" to critique the male backlash. This tension suggests internal conflict: a simultaneous rejection of feminism and a call to contain extreme masculinity.

Thus, the post can be understood as representing a conservative discourse attempting to restore social balance amid shifting digital values, offering a dual critique of both Western-influenced feminism and reactive masculinity, with religion and tradition presented as the "natural and settled" solution for social harmony.

This internal tension sparked intense public reactions to the post, including confrontational responses rejecting its value-laden tone. One reply states:

"May God curse this whole 'family bonding' thing you keep harping on. We don't waaaaant it! Stop pushing it—do it alone until you're tired."

This comment is highly sarcastic, mocking traditional values like family cohesion and reframing them as burdens or collective constraints. The exaggerated repetition of letters heightens the emotional tone.

Another reply criticizes the male backlash against feminism, accusing men of delusion:

"Hahahahahahahahaha it's amazing how men live in psychosis and distort reality out of fear and the fantasies they live in."

This response uses psychiatric language like "psychosis" and carries a sharp accusatory tone. These comments reflect how digital society has become a stage for symbolic conflict. As Badri and Mughni (2023) argue, the accessibility and lack of regulation on social media platforms have enabled users from diverse backgrounds to express views freely, making symbolic conflict more visible in digital communities. Here, reactions go beyond critique to ridicule, distortion, and redefinition of core social values. The tension between feminist discourse and male responses has become less about rational debate and more about a struggle over identity and knowledge.

IX.II.IV Representations of Women's Negotiation with Patriarchy

The theme of women negotiating with patriarchy is central to gender studies. The relationship between women and patriarchal systems is no longer seen simply as one of submission or confrontation but as a multidimensional negotiation. Women employ various strategies—from resistance to adaptation—to reshape their roles within patriarchal structures. This reflects a growing awareness of the self and the power dynamics at play. Such negotiations are visible not only in daily life but also in digital societies, as seen in several social media replies.

One response offers advice for dealing with a husband's anger:

"If you had just stayed quiet when he was angry, the argument would've ended. Anyway, now go tidy the house, prepare lunch, burn incense, and when he arrives, welcome him warmly and serve him lunch. Then ask for forgiveness and understanding. That way, you'll win his heart and rise in his eyes."

This response adapts to the patriarchal system, offering gentle instructions on how a woman can negotiate and appease a man—even if he was the one at fault. The smart woman, it suggests,

does not confront or criticize but diffuses tension through affection and subtlety. The underlying assumption is that a husband's anger is natural and must be managed by the wife, who is also held responsible for the relationship's stability. The message reinforces the idea that the wife is expected to tidy, serve, welcome, and apologize. This kind of discourse rewards women for patience and obedience without questioning the possibility of mutual responsibility. It frames the woman as the emotional caretaker of the relationship.

Another reply similarly reproduces patriarchal norms through a conciliatory tone. It advocates submission and compliance as tools for emotional peace, sidelining individual dignity and the right to autonomy:

"For your peace of mind, wear black and enjoy the trip. Don't be stubborn or create problems—just enjoy it and make him happy. Next time, don't pay for anything so he won't say you're doing him favors. The man is responsible for expenses."

This reply exemplifies how women are socialized to negotiate peace by giving up their rights. It does not question the husband's authority to dictate how his wife dresses but rather advises her to comply in order to maintain harmony and ensure future travel. Stubbornness and self-expression are reframed as "problems," and male authority is tied to financial provision. Women are advised not to contribute financially, lest their contribution be seen as leverage—thus delegitimizing their right to object.

Negotiating with patriarchy, in this context, means women (or society) adapting female roles within a male-dominated structure rather than confronting it. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power is useful here: the husband does not exert physical violence but symbolic power by threatening to cancel the trip. His authority is reinforced by third-party "soft" messages like these social media replies.

IX.III Representations and Methods of Social Stereotyping on Platform X

Posts circulating on Platform X directly contribute to the reproduction, reinforcement, and proliferation of social stereotypes through mechanisms such as rapid spread, linguistic reductionism, and the formation of insular ideological communities. The nature of short, shareable content facilitates the cementing and generalization of stereotypes across broad social categories, often without regard for individual or contextual differences. People's responses to such content vary—some reproduce it, others resist it, while some reinforce it.

This dynamic is clearly illustrated in the following viral post and its replies:

"Don't marry someone with lower energy than you. He'll become more attractive and desirable because of your influence, while you'll lose your charm, glow, and vibrancy."

Traits of a low-energy man:

- He awakens your maternal instinct rather than making you feel like a wife or lover!
- Blaming, sensitive, sulky
- Argumentative
- Dependent—waits for your support and encouragement
- Easily influenced by others, especially family and friends
- Vindictive—when angry, uses manipulative ways to express it
- Dismissive of your interests—you feel like he needs guidance and support
- You feel like the leader and hero instead of feeling safe and relaxed with him
- You give more than you receive
- You're the one solving your problems, and your sacrifices are the only reason the relationship continues"

This post, published on 28/3/2025 and viewed 1.6 million times, exemplifies how social stereotyping manifests in Saudi digital society. People often resort to categorizing others into ready-made molds to simplify social complexity and make it more digestible. Common expressions in society, such as "All men are like that" or "There must be something wrong with any divorced woman," reflect how people issue definitive judgments on inherently variable traits.

Issuing absolute judgments about traits with multiple meanings is widespread on Platform X. Users tend to make conclusive claims about characteristics that are open to interpretation and vary by social, cultural, or emotional context—treating such traits as having only one fixed meaning. This simplification of complexity and fixation on fluid attributes often leads to poor analysis and misjudgment of social realities.

In addition to being a form of hasty generalization, this also represents a logical fallacy: drawing broad conclusions based on limited data. As Hurley (2014) notes, this fallacy is common in informal discourse, where a single individual's experience is generalized to all relationships—for example, assuming that any low-energy man will inevitably be a burden on his wife, leading to an imbalanced and exhausting relationship.

According to Walter Mischel (1968), personal traits are not always consistently displayed but are activated in specific contexts—a concept he called the "personality signature." Similarly, Trait Activation Theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003) emphasizes that context and situation must be considered when analyzing behavior. People often fall into the attribution error, blaming another's actions on inherent traits rather than acknowledging external context—thus reinforcing the tendency to fixate on traits and ignore situational influence (Bandinelli & Palma, 2012).

Social stereotyping is both a mental and social process that reduces individuals or groups to a singular image based on

religion, gender, region, accent, profession, or other attributes. It assigns fixed characteristics or behaviors based on perceived group membership and is repeated so often it becomes accepted digital reality, regardless of accuracy (Locksley, Ortiz, & Hepburn, 1980). It is also a largely unconscious cognitive process, producing relatively fixed cultural generalizations that are treated as truths. These are culturally constructed, media-reinforced, resistant to change, and can lead to discrimination (Fiske, 2018).

One of the replies to the post suggests that this type of partnership inevitably leads to a draining relationship where the woman loses her sense of stability, with no recognition of individual differences or possibilities of mutual support:

“Your words are painful but very realistic. Sometimes a man’s low energy makes you feel responsible for him instead of being his partner. Instead of living a stable, comfortable life, you end up dragging him with you every step of the way. Every woman deserves someone who lightens her burden, not adds to it.”

Another reply points to a deeper issue prevalent on social media platforms: the cultural discourse around relationships, especially marriage, shapes how people perceive and understand these institutions. It reshapes how individuals view themselves, others, and social connections:

“Tired and empty talk. Listen, dear, marriage is about mutual compatibility. There’s no such thing as ‘drains my energy’ or ‘took my youth.’ This talk only ruins households. A woman with no sense will believe it and start thinking, ‘Yes, my husband’s like that,’ when in fact he might be a good man—but now the talk has gotten into her head.”

Such discourse is widespread in digital spaces, where representations of social relationships are based on individual feelings and experiences, presented as universal truths. This reflects how digital communities can create extreme—and sometimes unrealistic—perceptions of marriage, generating a distinct cultural narrative that must be critically engaged with. As Nancy (2015) explains, online relationship discourse doesn’t merely reflect interpersonal dynamics—it reshapes how people understand connection and commitment. This often leads to generalizations and judgments that don’t reflect the reality of these systems.

X. MOST SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

1. Representations of gender in the Saudi digital society reveal that the cultural discourse surrounding femininity and masculinity remains rooted in a traditional binary, reproducing stereotypical roles despite surrounding social changes.
2. Representations of digital interactions indicate a growing feminist awareness, often met with defensive or aggressive masculine responses. This reflects a clash

between a liberatory discourse and a conservative one seeking to preserve the status quo.

3. Representations of the institution of marriage in Saudi society have undergone notable shifts, with rising individualistic values and a declining desire to form families through traditional means. Some individuals now prefer to remain single or postpone marriage for reasons related to personal independence and social rejection of conventional constraints.
4. Marital conflicts have increasingly become public content in the digital sphere, threatening marital privacy and reshaping the concept of intimacy. Some personal issues are now treated as matters of public opinion and subjected to open societal judgment.
5. A diversity of representations was observed in how women negotiate with patriarchy in the digital society—ranging from sarcasm and ridicule to rational awareness-raising—in attempts to destabilize the authoritarian structure of dominant masculine ideologies.
6. Digital discussions revealed divergent understandings of emotional fulfillment. Some individuals view emotional sufficiency as weakening attachment motivations, while others see it as foundational to mature relationships and conscious choices. This reflects a disagreement over the nature of emotional balance within marriage.
7. The prevailing digital culture increasingly reduces representations of marriage, portraying it at times as an escape from family or a means to achieve superficial independence. This suggests a growing superficiality in how life-altering relationships are evaluated.
8. Platform X shows a strong presence of social stereotyping representations, where humor, sarcasm, and generalizations are often used to reinforce or reproduce stereotypes related to gender, marriage, and cultural affiliations.

XI. LIMITATIONS

Although this study contributes to understanding representations of social relationships in the Saudi digital society, it faces certain methodological and field-related limitations.

First, the study focused on a specific sample of digital platforms (the social media platform X), which may limit the generalizability of its findings and the applicability of its data collection and analysis methods to other social media platforms.

Second, the study relied on a qualitative methodology and the digital ethnography approach, which makes it susceptible to subjective interpretations influenced by the researcher’s background and potentially not generalizable.

Lastly, the study was limited to analyzing digital practices within narrow contexts and did not include widely used digital cultural media in Saudi society, such as memes or specialized communities on X (formerly Twitter), which are essential spaces

for expressing and producing representations of social relationships in the Saudi digital society.

Accordingly, the current research recommends that future studies broaden their analysis of cultural discourse across various social media platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat, and adopt a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative tools—such as surveys and content analysis—to obtain more generalizable results.

XII. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Given the role that visual content plays in producing and shaping cultural discourse, the study recommends conducting analytical research on **memes** widely circulated across digital platforms. Memes are a form of contemporary social discourse, rich with symbolic implications and satirical social critique. They can reflect social and cultural representations and indicate trends in collective consciousness regarding issues such as marriage, family, and individualism.
2. Conduct analytical studies on various social media platforms such as **TikTok** and **Instagram**, with the aim of comparing the nature of relationships and interaction styles on each platform, considering the differences in user demographics and usage motivations.
3. Carry out future **sociological studies** on digital communities to understand their impact on human and societal behavior, recognizing these communities as an integral part of the social and cultural landscape—not merely spaces for fleeting interactions.

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AUTHORS

First Author – Dr. Yahya Torkey Alkhazraj, PhD, King Abdulaziz University

Second Author – Samah Mohammed Al-Ghamdi, PhD Candidate, King Abdulaziz University,

Correspondence Author – Dr. Yahya Torkey Alkhazraj,