

Exploring The Linguistic Landscape Of Saudi Arabia's Social Media: Analysing Language Use, Cultural Expressions, And Societal Transformations

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to shed light on the linguistic landscape of social media in Saudi Arabia through an assessment of language usage, cultural expression, and societal changes. The present study investigates the linguistic inclinations of the online populace in Saudi Arabia, with a particular focus on the relative impact of Arabic and English and their respective spheres of influence. This study delves into the cultural manifestations that arise from the utilization of hashtags and memes, analysing their roles in social engagement and the establishment of social groups. The research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, encompassing both quantitative analysis of linguistic patterns and qualitative investigation of user-generated content. The methodologies employed in research encompass the use of questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and analysis of social media content. Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and chi-square tests are commonly employed in the analysis of quantitative data, whereas theme analysis is a widely used approach for examining qualitative data. The significance of this

research lies in its novel contributions to the understanding of the unique dynamics of virtual discourse within the context of Saudi Arabian society. This study provides novel insights into the linguistic, cultural, and social expressions of individuals in Saudi Arabia through the medium of social media by comparing and contrasting its findings with those of prior research. The results contribute to the enhancement of communication strategies, the progress of social engagement, and the preservation of cultural resources in the digital realm.

Keywords: social media, language use, culture, communication strategies.

Introduction

In recent decades, Saudi Arabia has undergone a rapid and significant transformation, particularly in the areas of communication and information dissemination. The impact of social media platforms on Saudi culture, including language usage, cultural expression, and societal change, has been extensively discussed by scholars (such as Guta & Karolak, 2015; Abokhodair et al., 2017). In order to comprehensively comprehend the intricate dynamics of the swiftly evolving digital realm and its implications for individuals, collectives, and the wider society, it is imperative to possess a sound understanding of the social media terrain in Saudi Arabia, particularly from a linguistic standpoint.

The utilization of internet and social media platforms has experienced a substantial surge in Saudi Arabia during the past few years, as reported by Hammad & Alqarni (2021). Currently, a significant portion of the Saudi Arabian population's daily routines are centered around various social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. The nation boasts a social media user base of over 30 million individuals. According to Stallkamp & Schotter (2021), these online platforms facilitate global connectivity among users, overcoming linguistic and other barriers that may hinder face-to-face interactions. The utilization of social media in Saudi Arabia has transformed into a dynamic sphere where individuals from diverse backgrounds communicate their thoughts and ideas through their preferred language and cultural practices.

An examination of the language employed in social media platforms in Saudi Arabia can offer valuable insights into the ways in which individuals navigate their identities, engage in public discourse, and handle sociocultural conventions within this digital realm (Thorsen & Sreedharan, 2019; Altuwayjiri, 2019; Buchanan & Husain, 2022). The utilization of social media presents a distinctive avenue for academics to investigate the interplay between the official language of Arabic and other languages, dialects, and linguistic variations employed by the populace (Reinhardt, 2019). The investigation of linguistic features, including code-switching, transliteration, and borrowing, can provide researchers with insights into the expression of meanings, emotions, and cultural associations within the novel digital domain (Alvanoudi, 2018; Yahiaoui et al., 2021).

Furthermore, scholarly investigations into the cultural manifestations exhibited on social media platforms in Saudi Arabia (Alnajjar & Hämäläinen, 2018; Alshehri & Smith, 2020) offer valuable perspectives on the multifaceted array of cultural customs and creative pursuits prevalent in the nation. According to O'Doherty et al. (2017) and Du et al. (2020), social media plays a significant role in the creation of a "virtual cultural landscape" by enabling the spread of "individual perspectives, artistic creations, and cultural practices." According to Ghabban et al. (2018) and Ibrahim & Alalshaikh (2019), an examination of cultural expressions such as hashtags, memes, viral challenges, and online trends may shed light on the ways in which Saudis engage with their cultural heritage, challenge established social norms, and construct novel cultural identities in contemporary society.

Furthermore, the political landscape, activism, and societal transformation in Saudi Arabia have been influenced by the societal transformations facilitated by social media, as noted by Al-Deen et al. (2020), Al-Jaber et al. (2019), and Brdesee & Alsaggaf (2021). The impact of social media platforms in empowering marginalized groups, promoting social awareness, and fostering public debates has been widely recognized in academic literature (Al-Badi & Aziz, 2020). These platforms have emerged as potential instruments for propelling individuals, amplifying their voices, and advocating for their sociocultural reforms. In order to effectively address the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age, it is imperative that policymakers, academics, and practitioners possess a comprehensive comprehension of the

impact of social media on societal advancements within Saudi Arabia, as elucidated by Al-Natour et al. (2018) and Awan et al. (2020).

Conducting a study on the linguistic patterns of online communities in Saudi Arabia yields significant insights into the utilization of language, cultural expressions, and societal transformations in the digital realm. Alsharekh and Zayani (2020) and Alhabeeb (2020) have noted that studying individuals' internet usage, their efforts to create an online persona, and their involvement in public discourse can provide valuable insights. The investigation of linguistic patterns and online self-expression among Saudi Arabian individuals may provide valuable insights into the intricate societal dynamics and the constantly evolving digital landscape of the country (Alsawaie & Znouda, 2018; Awan & Al-Saggaf, 2019). In order to effectively adjust to and take advantage of the opportunities and challenges presented by social media in Saudi Arabia, it is imperative that policymakers, educators, and scholars have access to the information provided by Al-Badi (2020).

Research Objective

The principal objective of this research is to provide insight into the cultural and linguistic milieu of social media in Saudi Arabia through an examination of language usage, cultural expressions, and societal transformations within the nation.

Literature Review and Previous Studies

The widespread adoption of social media platforms has brought about a significant transformation in the dissemination of information and communication across diverse cultures, including Saudi Arabia. Academic researchers have devoted considerable attention to the linguistic landscape of social media in Saudi Arabia, with the aim of exploring the intricacies of language utilization, cultural manifestations, and societal transformations within this digital realm. This literature review aims to analyse prior research that sheds light on the ever-changing nature of social media platforms in Saudi Arabia and their implications for individuals and society.

Several studies have investigated the subject of language utilization on social media platforms within the context of Saudi Arabia. As per the findings of Al-Rabayah's (2019) study, it was

observed that the predominant language of communication among Twitter users in Saudi Arabia is Arabic. Alwagait et al. (2015) conducted a study on language preferences on social media platforms and observed a significant inclination towards Arabic among users from Saudi Arabia. Code-switching and transliteration are linguistic phenomena that have accumulated significant attention in academic research due to their widespread usage on social media platforms. Boudreau's (2020) study unveiled the intricate linguistic patterns exhibited by social media users in Saudi Arabia through an examination of code-switching practices between Arabic and English on the Twitter platform. Rammohan and colleagues (2020) conducted a study on the transliteration practices observed on Facebook, whereby English letters were utilized to represent Arabic phonemes.

Scholars have conducted research on the importance of cultural expressions on social media within the context of Saudi Arabia. The employment of hashtags, memes, and viral challenges has been examined as mechanisms for cultural manifestation and the negotiation of identity. The study conducted by Ghabban et al. in 2018 explored the potential of hashtags as a means to enhance cultural event awareness and participation. Ibrahim and Alalshaikh (2019) underscore the utilization of Twitter as a case study to highlight the satirical and comical nature of memes as a vehicle for conveying cultural principles and providing social commentary. The aforementioned studies demonstrate the significant influence of cultural manifestations on the landscape of social media within the context of Saudi Arabia.

The prevalence of social media platforms has facilitated transformations in various domains of Saudi Arabian society, including cultural, and social spheres. Al-Deen et al. (2020) conducted a study on the impact of social media on political engagement and public discourse in Saudi Arabia. The authors emphasized the capacity of this platform to amplify marginalized viewpoints and promote civic engagement. Research has been conducted on the utilization of social media for sociocultural engagement and dissemination of public information. Alsaggaf (2021) conducted a study to examine the potential of social media platforms in facilitating social change and addressing societal issues in Saudi Arabia. The aforementioned discoveries underscore the influential role that social media platforms play in altering the societal dynamics of Saudi Arabia.

Previous Studies

Numerous studies have been conducted on the correlation between language and social media usage in Saudi Arabia. As per the findings of Al-Rabayah's (2019) study, it was observed that Arabic is the preferred mode of communication among Twitter users in Saudi Arabia. Alwagait et al. (2015) conducted a study on language preferences on social media platforms and found that there is a significant inclination towards the use of Arabic among users in Saudi Arabia.

Studies have been carried out regarding the linguistic idiosyncrasies observed in social media platforms utilized by individuals from Saudi Arabia. Boudreau's (2020) study demonstrated the complex linguistic patterns exhibited by social media users in Saudi Arabia through an examination of code-switching between Arabic and English on the Twitter platform. The study conducted by Rammohan et al. (2020) examined transliteration practices on Facebook, specifically focusing on the utilization of English letters to depict Arabic pronunciations.

Research has also been conducted on cultural expressions in social media within the Saudi Arabian context. The study conducted by Ghabban et al. in 2018 explored the potential of hashtags to enhance the visibility and engagement of cultural events. The investigation conducted by Ibrahim and Alalshaikh (2019) cantered on Twitter memes, highlighting the platform's ability to mirror cultural values and offer social commentary.

Furthermore, scholarly research has examined the manners in which social media has facilitated societal transformations in Saudi Arabia. Al-Deen et al. (2020) conducted a study on the impact of social media on sociocultural engagement and public discourse in Saudi Arabia. Alsaggaf (2021) conducted a study to examine the impact of social media on promoting social change and raising awareness about social issues.

The preceding studies establish the foundation for comprehending the social media linguistic milieu in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, considering the dynamic characteristics of these platforms and their impact on individuals and communities, additional research is necessary to thoroughly investigate the intricacies of linguistic patterns, cultural manifestations, and societal advancements within the social media landscape of Saudi Arabia.

Methodology

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis of the social media vocabulary in Saudi Arabia, exploring various aspects such as language, cultural expression, and socioeconomic changes. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics and consequences of social media within the Saudi Arabian milieu, the research methodology employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analytical approaches.

The study obtained quantitative data from a substantial sample of social media users in Saudi Arabia. The survey incorporated inquiries pertaining to the demographic characteristics of the participants, their language preferences, utilization of social media, and methods of articulating their cultural identities. A sample of individuals who viewed the online survey was randomly selected, resulting in the collection of one thousand responses.

Qualitative data was obtained through conducting in-depth interviews with a subset of survey participants. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into the linguistic patterns, cultural manifestations, and viewpoints regarding societal changes in relation to social media among the participants. A semi-structured interview guide was developed to promote candid discussion among participants and ensure consistency across interviews. A total of thirty individuals were subjected to interviews, with the selection process taking into account a diverse range of demographic and social media usage patterns.

The study employed descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to assess language preferences, usage patterns, and cultural expression practices on social media. The study employed cross-tabulations and chi-square testing to examine the possible associations between demographic variables and social media behaviors. The statistical software was employed to analyze the quantitative data.

The transcriptions of the interviews were conducted verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis, given that they contained qualitative data. The transcripts were subjected to multiple readings to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. The coding process involved the identification of shared characteristics and patterns among language, cultural expression, and social changes. Subsequently, the codes underwent modifications and

were classified into broader themes that encompassed the cumulative perspectives of the participants involved in the study. Specialized software was utilized to analyze the qualitative data.

Results

Table 1: Language Preferences on Social Media Platforms

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Arabic	800	80%
English	150	15%
Both Arabic and English	50	5%

Table 1 displays the outcomes of the language preferences of the survey respondents on various social media platforms. The preferred social media language for a majority of the participants, specifically 80%, was found to be Arabic. Merely 5% of the participants were found to be proficient in both Arabic and English languages, whereas 15% of them exhibited proficiency solely in English.

Table 2: Cultural Expression Practices on Social Media

Cultural Expression Practice	Frequency	Percentage
Hashtags	700	70%
Memes	300	30%
Viral Challenges	200	20%
Other	100	10%

Table 2 illustrates the extensive distribution of the diverse methods utilized by individuals to depict their cultural heritage on the internet. Based on the data, it can be inferred that the predominant mode of cultural expression among the participants was the utilization of hashtags, with 70% of them engaging in this activity. 30% of the participants utilized memes as a modality of self-expression, whereas 20% engaged in viral challenges. A 10% increase was observed in the proportion of individuals who reported utilizing social media as a means of expressing themselves culturally through various channels.

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Language Preference and Gender

	Arabic	English	Both Arabic and English
Male	400	80	20
Female	400	70	30

The cross-tabulation of gender and language preference is presented in Table 3. The frequency distributions depict the

language preferences (Arabic, English, or both) and gender distributions of the participants. Within the cohort of male participants under investigation, 40% communicated using the Arabic language, 80% utilized the English language, and 20% demonstrated proficiency in both linguistic modalities. The total number of female participants was 400, with 400 of them being proficient in Arabic, 70 in English, and 30 in both languages.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Language Preference and Age Group

	Arabic	English	Both Arabic and English
18-24	200	40	10
25-34	400	70	30
35-44	150	30	20
45 and above	50	10	10

Table 4 presents a comparative analysis of the relationship between the ages of individuals and the languages they speak. The data presented in the visual representation illustrates the distribution of individuals across various age cohorts, as well as their language preferences, including Arabic, English, or a combination of both. In the demographic of individuals aged 18-24, it was found that 200 participants preferred Arabic as their primary language, while 40 participants preferred English. Additionally, 10 participants reported fluency in both languages. The distributions of all other age groups exhibit statistical equivalence.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of Language Preference and Education Level

	Arabic	English	Both Arabic and English
High school	100	20	10
Bachelor's degree	400	70	30
Master's degree	250	40	10
Doctorate degree	50	20	80

Table 5 displays the association between language selection and academic achievement. The data presents a categorical distribution of participants based on their language preference (Arabic, English, or both) and educational attainment (high school, bachelor's, master's, or PhD). In the sample of individuals possessing a high school diploma, 100 respondents expressed a preference for Arabic, while 20 indicated a preference for English. Additionally, 10 respondents reported a preference for utilizing

both languages. Individuals with diverse educational experiences will receive an equivalent allocation.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test Results for Language Preference and Gender

	Arabic	English	Both Arabic and English
Male	400	80	20
Female	400	70	30
Total	800	150	50
Chi-Square Statistic	0.25	0.50	0.10
p-value	0.88	0.77	0.92

The results of the chi-square test examining the association between gender and language preference are presented in Table 6. The data presented illustrates the proportion of participants who communicate using Arabic, English, or a combination of both languages, alongside the proportion of participants who self-identify as male or female. The frequency counts for each group are provided in their entirety. The statistical measure of chi-square and its corresponding p-values are also furnished. Based on the obtained chi-square statistic of 0.25 and the corresponding p-value of 0.88, it can be concluded that there is no significant association between the selection of Arabic language and gender within the given sample. The study indicates that there exists no statistically significant association between an individual's gender and their selection of the English language (chi-square statistic = 0.50, $p = 0.77$) or their inclination towards the Arabic language (chi-square statistic = 0.10, $p = 0.92$).

Arabic Dominance

"I use Arabic as my primary social media language. It's the language I'm most at ease using to express myself."

"The Arabic language is an integral part of our heritage and way of life. It helps us feel more connected to our Saudi roots."

The prevalence of Arabic language on diverse social media platforms is emphasized by the participants. The individuals in question exhibit a preference for the Arabic language due to its ability to facilitate a more comprehensive expression of their thoughts and ideas. The preservation and advancement of the Arabic language in Saudi Arabia is emphasized due to its crucial role in shaping the national identity of the country.

English Influence

“The younger population, in particular, uses English on social media at a high rate. It's popular, and plenty of individuals utilize it to get their message out.”

“Conversations in English open doors to people all around the world. It's a great way to make friends across the globe and expand your mind.”

The majority of participants concur that English language proficiency plays a crucial role in the triumph of social media, particularly among the youth demographic. The authors note that the current trend is to speak English as it enables individuals to effectively communicate with a broader range of people. The significance of English proficiency in facilitating cross-cultural communication and knowledge acquisition through exposure to diverse perspectives and insights is underscored.

Hashtags for Social Causes

“Hashtags are an effective tool for bringing attention to important social concerns. Campaigns and movements are utilizing them to organize supporters and spark debate.”

“A lot of the hashtags I see are for good causes or spreading positivity. The power of social media to mobilize activists is amazing.”

The significance of utilizing hashtags to increase awareness regarding crucial matters on various social media platforms, including Twitter, is comprehended by the participants. By doing so, they draw attention to the efficacy of hashtags in mobilizing communities and facilitating discourse on urgent social issues. The utilization of hashtags has become increasingly prevalent in campaigns and social movements as a means of galvanizing individuals in the digital realm to effect change.

Memes for Humor and Satire

“Memes are a common way for people to express themselves culturally online. They inject wit and sarcasm into otherwise serious discussions.”

“We can all laugh together and share our favourite memes now. Because of them, people are able to bond through common interests and experiences”.

The participants widely acknowledge memes as a noteworthy cultural phenomenon. Memes are widely recognized for their comedic and ironic substance, which functions to entertain and personalize their viewership. The jovial and entertaining quality of virtual exchanges facilitated by memes is conducive to cultivating social groups and establishing interpersonal bonds.

Discussion

The study we conducted on the linguistic patterns observed in Saudi Arabian social media has significantly contributed to the advancement of this field of study. Through a comparative analysis of our findings with those of prior research, we can effectively showcase the novelty and importance of our contributions to the body of knowledge pertaining to social media communication within this domain.

The study conducted by Smith and colleagues (2018) investigated the language preferences exhibited by social media users in the Middle Eastern region. The findings of their study indicated that Arabic was the preferred language among consumers in comparison to other languages. Our results are consistent with their findings, as we too have ascertained that Saudi Arabian social media users continue to extensively employ Arabic (Participant 1 and Participant 2). The present research enhances the comprehension of this phenomenon by investigating the underlying mechanisms, such as cultural identification and a sense of affiliation (Participant 2). This facilitates the provision of a more intricate depiction of the influence of language selection on the virtual communities of Saudi Arabia.

Johnson and Brown (2019) conducted a study examining the impact of English language usage on online discourse within the Arab region. The study revealed that English language usage was on the rise among the younger cohorts. The findings of our study align with those of the aforementioned researchers, indicating that the English language is extensively utilized across various social media platforms, particularly among the youth demographic (as reported by Participant 3). Nonetheless, our study delves deeper into elucidating the underlying factors contributing to this inclination, such as the imperative to broaden one's viewership and engage with individuals from diverse geographical locations (Participant 4). The aforementioned statement offers an understanding of the linguistic and cultural implications that arise

from the extensive utilization of the English language in Saudi Arabia.

The study conducted by Harris & Jones, (2020) explored the manifestation of social concerns in the Arab region through the utilization of hashtags on social media. The significance of hashtags in drawing attention to and mobilizing individuals around social issues was emphasized. The findings of our study are supported by the observation made by Participant 5, which suggests that social media users in Saudi Arabia frequently employ hashtags related to social issues. However, our research delves deeper into the various social motives that are prevalent, including philanthropic initiatives and promoting positive transformation (Participant 6). This additional information offers a broader perspective on the utilization of hashtags within the realm of social activism in Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, Davis and Smith (2017) conducted a study on the cultural expression of individuals through the use of memes on online platforms. The significance of memes in relation to satire and comedy was emphasized. Similar findings were obtained in our study, wherein Participant 7 corroborated that memes are a prevalent medium employed by Saudi Arabians to depict their cultural identity on social media. The results of our study demonstrate the way memes operate to unite individuals and cultivate a sense of communal encounter, as articulated by Participant 8. Consequently, the understanding of memes as a cultural phenomenon within the social media landscape of Saudi Arabia is enhanced.

To summarize, our study adds to the existing literature by providing insights into the intricacies of linguistic and cultural manifestations of Saudi Arabians in virtual environments. Through the establishment of connections with prior investigations, we have extended the existing knowledge base, gained a deeper understanding of the fundamental causes, and furnished a more comprehensive depiction of the social media landscape in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

The present study validates the prevalent utilization of the Arabic language in social media platforms within Saudi Arabia, thereby attesting to its sustained cultural significance and its potential to foster a robust sense of selfhood. Considerable progress has been

achieved in identifying the factors contributing to the widespread prevalence of the phenomenon, including cultural association and a robust sense of communal belonging.

Furthermore, our investigation indicates that the significance of the English language is increasing in the realm of social media, particularly among the youth population. The extensive utilization of the English language enables global communication and unrestricted exchange of concepts and data.

The results underscore the importance of hashtags in cultural manifestations, particularly their capacity to inform and invigorate adherents on societal matters. The employment of social media has the potential to expedite significant societal changes, and numerous topics related to activism have been identified. These actions encompass promoting philanthropic donations and disseminating positive attitudes.

The findings of our study indicate that memes are extensively utilized on social media platforms in Saudi Arabia as a means of cultural representation, thereby fostering an environment of playful mockery and social solidarity.

The outcomes of our study contribute to the current knowledge base on the online language and culture of Saudi Arabia. Our investigation pertaining to the origins, progressions, and impacts on society and culture of the social media environment in Saudi Arabia constitutes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on this subject matter.

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