

Family Relationships In Arab Societies In The Context Of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

In light of the wide spread of communication technologies, especially social networking sites, which has increased its role and impact on the nature of human relations, as this wide spread of various information has been met with News, ideas ...The nature of social relationships in general and family relationships in particular has changed, and it is noted that social media has a role in narrowing the circle of social relations between families.

There is no doubt that in the light of the communication revolution that the world is experiencing now, social media has become a widespread phenomenon affecting the way individuals think and talk to others. this is what made the creators and developers of social media networks lead the new world and formulate its culture (globalization), set its policies and control its economy with their communication tools, which has become a means of controlling the world and imposing the culture of globalization and its values. it is natural in light of this domination that societies are influenced by a culture different from their own.

Keywords: Family-Family Relations-new media.

Introduction:

Change is a natural phenomenon that governs human life, with many sociologists asserting that societies themselves do not truly exist, but rather, social processes and interactions that are constantly evolving.

In the modern era, the world has witnessed a significant expansion in the use of modern technology, especially in the field of media and communication, particularly with the advent of smartphones and the internet, which have compressed both time and geography. Along with this, the nature of communication has also transformed, driven by the widespread need to use social media platforms. These platforms have created an alternative environment where communication between members of society has shifted from a real world to a virtual one. This new virtual space fosters and establishes new social and cultural values, which could potentially be foreign to Arab societies.

Since every society has its own unique culture, which is passed down through the family from generation to generation, the Arab family has its culture rooted in its Arab-Islamic civilization. The family, as a social system, is one of the manifestations of this inherited culture. The role of the family is to preserve its authentic cultural components, confront incoming cultural currents, and protect its cultural identity from being infiltrated or dominated by external cultures.

At the level of relationships within the family, there has been a noticeable social change in the dynamics of relationships, whether between spouses, between parents and children, or in the structural form of the family itself in terms of patterns, functions, status, and roles. This includes the content of upbringing and education that the family imparts to its children.

Problem Statement:

One of the topics that has preoccupied many researchers across various disciplines is the issue of social globalization, which aims to standardize the world according to prevailing social patterns in the Western world. This process seeks to undermine and destroy the family unit, a topic of great significance to Arab society in general, and Islamic society in particular. It has special importance for the family, which is the fundamental building block of our societies. The challenges posed by Western civilization have created several problematic issues in this regard (Mona, 2014, p. 487). Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, among others, have become hallmarks of the modern era, drastically changing the

patterns of social relationships and methods of communication within society.

Moreover, the differences in the ideas and concepts disseminated by various media outlets create a degree of anomie, which threatens the system of societal values, not only locally but globally. Any impact on society inevitably affects the family, as it is the basic unit of Arab society. The Arab family, in particular, bears many roles and responsibilities in the fields of education and social upbringing, in addition to its critical role in preserving cultural heritage, ethical values, and religious teachings, and passing them down from one generation to the next.

In the face of current challenges, the structure of the family, its functional roles, values, and components have changed. The advancement of communication technology and the increasing prevalence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have transformed social interaction into a virtual society, characterized by symbolic interactions and relationships within the virtual world, involving people who differ in identity, values, and components. Consequently, each individual has become content with their own private world, confined to the screen of a mobile phone or computer.

Thus, this research paper seeks to address the problem of family relationships in the context of new social media by posing the following question:

What are the effects that the social media paradigm has had on the nature of family relationships?

2. Significance of the Study:

- The family is the cornerstone of society, emphasized by Islamic teachings in Muslim societies due to its crucial role in nurturing a balanced individual and integrating them socially, contributing to the continuity and stability of society.
- Like any scientific study, the primary goal of this research paper is to enrich sociological literature by delving into the use of social media networks and examining how they have changed the patterns of social relationships, which clearly impacts family members' attitudes and the culture of society.

3. Study Objectives:

- To understand the nature of virtual social relationships.
- To compare traditional social family relationships with their virtual social counterparts.
- To examine the impact of social media on the nature of family relationships.

4. Methodology:

This research paper falls under the category of descriptive-analytical studies. It explores the nature of family relationships in the context of social globalization and the social media paradigm. The study involves gathering data and information related to the phenomenon of social media, analyzing it, and interpreting it within its various contexts. This approach allows for conclusions that can help mitigate the negative effects of communication and information technology on the nature of family relationships in Arab societies.

First: Defining Concepts:

1. **Family:** Giddens defines the family as a group of individuals connected by kinship ties, where the adult members are responsible for raising children. Giddens distinguishes between the terms "family" and "household." He refers to the nuclear family as consisting of only the parents and their children, while the extended family includes other individuals who either live with the parents and children under one roof or are connected to them through relationships (Anthony, 2001, p. 254).

2. **Related Concepts :**

- **Social Relationships:** According to Ibrahim Othman, social relationships are a form of social interaction between two or more parties, where each party has an image of the other that influences their judgment, either positively or negatively. Examples of these relationships include friendships, family ties, kinship, work colleagues, acquaintances, and friends (Othman, 2004, p. 27).

2. Social Media: Social media refers to media content characterized by its personal nature and the interaction between two parties—one as the sender and the other as the

receiver—via the internet. It provides the sender with the freedom to deliver messages and the receiver the freedom to respond. Social media also refers to new ways of communicating in the digital environment, allowing smaller groups of people to meet and gather online to exchange benefits and information. It creates an environment where individuals can amplify their voices and the voices of their communities to the world [(Asaad, 2012, p. 335)] .

2.1 Related Concepts :

- **Social Networking Sites:** These are electronic network systems that allow users to create their own profiles and connect with other members who share similar interests and hobbies, or with friends from university or high school (Zaher, 2003, p. 23).

Second: Family Relationships in Traditional and Contemporary Families:

In traditional society, families were structurally composed of two or more generations, including grandparents, parents, and grandchildren, all living together in a shared household. The core feature of social relationships within traditional families was based on cohesion, solidarity, and unity within relationships characterized by affection, love, and loyalty to the family. This gave family members a sense of emotional stability and selflessness, where individuals did not live for themselves but for their family members. Individual values and practices encouraged collective values, and individuals were recognized primarily through their connection to the group (Halim, 1986, p. 176).

In the Arab environment, families have traditionally followed an extended structure, where parents, grandparents, and relatives such as uncles and aunts lived together under one roof. This was a result of shared housing and patriarchal authority, with the father being considered the spiritual leader, responsible for the family's economic obligations and social responsibilities. The mother's role was centered on providing care and affection, staying closely connected to her children even into adulthood or after marriage.

The patriarchal authority also extended to the grandfather, who was seen as the leader of the entire family group. His word was respected, and his orders were followed, ensuring the

cohesion and stability of the extended family. Therefore, in Arab societies, the family is the fundamental unit that unites relatives and centralizes authority within a close-knit gathering of multiple generations (Belnour, 2022, pp. 63-64). Family cohesion was considered one of the key indicators of extended families, manifesting clearly in the satisfaction of each family member with their assigned tasks, all contributing to the general well-being of the entire family unit.

However, in recent times, family structures have changed. The number of family members has decreased, and families have become smaller and nuclear, often consisting only of parents and children. Roles within the family have also evolved, with each individual now seeking personal freedom. Women entering the workforce, as a result of higher education levels, have expanded their responsibilities beyond child-rearing. Decision-making within the family has become more democratic, and the previous atmosphere of fear and intimidation has diminished. The authority of the father has also waned compared to earlier times.

Third: The Relationship Between social media and the Family:

The use of information and communication technologies, along with media platforms, is one of the hallmarks of modernity. In this context, the topic of family relationships, including social relationships within the Arab environment, has been significantly influenced by the adoption of these technologies and the accompanying global openness. This has led to changes in the roles, functions, and structure of the family.

"In the middle of the third millennium, social media platforms emerged and gained widespread global popularity, overshadowing what sociologists once referred to as the 'third place,' which individuals would frequent after their primary place (home) and secondary place (work, school, etc.). It became evident that this third place had now shifted to the digital world" (Tahseen, 2012, p. 3).

In the Arab world, our societies have entered a new era characterized by a significant increase in internet users, reaching around 226 million users by 2018, according to the Knowledge Economy Report (2015-2016) prepared by Orinet Planet Research. The report indicates that more than 55% of these users primarily engage with social media networks,

reflecting the growing role of these platforms and their increasing influence on the lives of communities day by day (Ahmed, p. 514).

The consumption of digital age technology by individuals, families, and society continues to grow daily. Statistics from 2021 show that Africa ranks third globally in internet usage, with 11.5%. According to the site We Are Social, in July 2021, the global population of internet subscribers reached 4.8 billion people, representing 61% of the world's population, with a large segment using mobile phones 92% of the global internet audience. Facebook users numbered 2.85 billion, WhatsApp had 2 billion subscribers, Instagram reached 1.4 billion users, and YouTube had 2.29 billion subscribers.

Social media platforms have become an essential part of individuals' daily lives, transforming life into a digital experience through this communication technology. Several reports indicate that 55% of these platform users are Arabs (Arab Family in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Challenges, cited in Arab Magazine, 2022).

There is a continuous increase in the use of new media, with social media being the most prominent, and an increasing number of Arab society members are engaging in this symbolic space. Interactions occurring in the virtual world via the internet have influenced many aspects of life, contributing to the formation of a new cultural framework known as symbolic culture, which unites participants. This culture has had a significant impact on broader societal culture, particularly on socialization institutions, with the family being one of the most prominent (Waleed, 2009, p. 7).

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Fourth: The Impact of Social Media on the Social Structure of the Family:

A. Socialization: The socialization process in Arab societies has traditionally been collective, with all family members contributing to this process. The child was not exclusively attached to the mother; relatives like uncles and aunts also played a role in the child's upbringing, teaching them the rules and behaviors expected of them. Thus, classical socialization processes were heavily focused on instilling a moral conscience in the child (Zerdoumi, 1979, p. 126). However, the transformation of the family structure, both functionally and structurally, as a central institution in society, has significantly impacted its ability to perform its role in the socialization of children. This shift has resulted in the family retreating from its traditional socialization responsibilities (Fatima and Azzouz, 2021, p. 711).

With the communication revolution, media has become an active partner in the socialization process. The absence of natural fulfillment for various psychological, spiritual, and emotional needs has led to a focus on satisfying material needs. This is due to the "wow factor" within an audiovisual system driven by visual culture, which controls the production and shaping of consciousness. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have created cultural values in individuals' minds that have no connection to the social structure they belong to, exposing social structures to "decaying modernity" (Belkeziz, 1998, p. 308) and the distortions caused by globalization.

B. Value Change:

"Family values represent a set of commonly held beliefs within the family, such as obedience to parents, socialization values, participation in marriage decisions, or independence from the family home after marriage, among others" (Mohamed, 1999, p. 28). Values, knowledge, and beliefs are foundational to any society's cultural and civilizational identity. Every family value is a social value. Today, however, the role of media in shaping values has become more influential than ever in either building or destroying these values. In the modern era, as a result of globalization's influence, a unified cultural model with a single language is being created through various media channels. This has made it easy to dismantle existing values and establish new ones, particularly in weaker societies that lack strong foundations, through the content of movies, TV series, and children's cartoons.

C. Disintegration and Family Estrangement:

The goal of marriage is to ensure the continuity of human existence within a family that lives in an atmosphere of tranquility, stability, and sustainability. In pre-modern life, the relationship between spouses was based on mutual respect and trust, in an environment of cohesion, solidarity, and unity among family members. However, with the onset of globalization, which has cast its shadow over all aspects of human life, including family relationships, excessive use of social media has led to changes in the nature of relationships within the family. For example, the relationship between spouses has cooled due to the lack of communication, the erosion of trust, and the formation of virtual relationships. This has also affected their relationship with their children, resulting in negligence of their parental duties, such as engaging in discussions with their children, reviewing their schoolwork, and fulfilling their roles. Consequently, the foundations of the family have weakened, leading to a deterioration in social relations among family members, a disruption of their roles, and a desire to break free from family constraints. This shift is attributed to the social changes society is undergoing, accompanied by various issues and problems (Fatima, 2012, p. 351).

The Cultural Structure of the Family:

One of the most significant processes employed by cultural globalization to penetrate societies is the strategy of changing

concepts, which is a fundamental approach of cultural globalization. Major world powers often demand that marginalized countries (especially Arab and Islamic ones) revise their educational curricula to align with contemporary trends and what they call "universal values," making this a condition for receiving aid or for being allowed to integrate into their sphere. This has clearly altered the family structure from an extended one, where parents, children, and grandchildren live together, to a nuclear family limited to just the parents. This shift has contributed to further moral decay, leading to the loss of the familial fabric that binds family members together, making them more vulnerable to the transformations and challenges they face. As a result, the bond of marriage quickly unravels for the most trivial reasons, transforming values that were once rooted in the concept of a strong covenant, as described in the Quran, into values that collapse in the face of globalization's byproducts and the weakening of individuals' psychological and intellectual resilience. The rising divorce rates are a clear indication of the discord within the family.

Furthermore, the consumerist orientation of globalization has distorted the role of the father, confining it to providing material pleasures and sustenance for the children. Over time, consumption becomes the father's primary focus and central concern.

In the rush to keep up with and respond to the byproducts of globalization, we, as Arab societies, have forgotten that we possess our own culture, which is passed down through the family from generation to generation. The Arab family has its culture rooted in Arab-Islamic civilization, and as a social system, it is a manifestation of this inherited culture. The family's role is to preserve the authentic cultural components of the Arab family, pass them on to the children, and resist foreign cultural currents, thereby protecting the cultural identity from being infiltrated or absorbed by external cultures. There is no doubt that in the midst of the communication revolution the world is currently experiencing, social media has become a widespread phenomenon, influencing how individuals think and interact with others.

C- The Prevalence of Consumer Culture within Families:

The family is a social institution and a fundamental component in the formation of society, acting as a stage for mutual social relationships. Contemporary life has introduced new meanings

and concepts, including the "global citizen" or "universal model," which the West has sought to establish through various methods. Social media, via different platforms, has become one of its most prominent tools. One manifestation of this is the exposure to various media content that promotes the goods and products of large capitalist companies. The aim is to expand the circle of consumption, increase the number of consumers, shape their tastes, support their aspirations, and instill a consumerist mentality. Moreover, the process of selective influence is now governed by knowledge standards controlled by those who own the media and modern communication technologies. This process takes place indirectly through planned programs and the crafting of advertising segments that make the viewer compare themselves to others in different societies. The direct impact on the consumer occurs primarily through sound, image, symbols, and suggestions highlighted in advertisements, which use whatever is available and attractive, regardless of the social and cultural value systems of each society. (Gill, 1999, p. 337)

Family relationships have also been significantly and clearly affected, whether between spouses or between parents and children, extending further to relatives. Each family member now isolates themselves with their mobile phone or computer, content with virtual conversations with virtual people. As a result, many relationships that once embodied solidarity and social support have been reduced to mere text messages exchanged through social media. Consequently, close family and neighborly relationships, which once played a crucial role in social cohesion, emotional sharing, mutual assistance, and the acquisition of life experiences, have diminished.

H- The Impact on Parent-Child Relationships:

Dr. Ashraf Thabet, a professor of psychiatry and an expert in behavior modification in Cairo, emphasizes that children's unhealthy attachment to social media and information technology has become a problem in every household. Parents have left their children at the mercy of these modern technological tools, which are characterized by their vast sources and abundant information windows, making it difficult for parents to communicate with this generation.

Social media has become a ticking time bomb, destroying all the foundations and efforts of proper educational upbringing for children. This indicates a functional disorder within the

family system according to functional-structural theory. Excessive browsing of social media and the long hours spent on computers or phones represent, in themselves, a functional imbalance at the expense of time that children could be spending with their families. Sociologist Talcott Parsons emphasized that in order to maintain the continuity of the family system, there must be family integration, referring to the complementary relationship between the units and parts within the family system.

Social media networks have become essential for all family members. According to sociologists, the functions and roles of the family have changed with the emergence of numerous online platforms, leading individuals to rethink the role of the family. They have begun to seek change and look for other companions in life, finding social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok to fill their emotional and social voids (Fatima & Hasroumia, 2018, p. 125).

R- The Emergence of Artificial Personalities:

Many family members, whether adults or children, resort to creating a fake virtual persona by impersonating a false identity or gender when interacting with their virtual friends. These artificial personalities often tend to lie or deceive others. People may adopt these fake personas to express unusual ideas, out of fear of expressing political opinions, or to engage in deception or spread rumors, which can disrupt social peace within a community (Hanaa, 2009, pp. 43-44).

Study Conclusion:

It is important to acknowledge the reality that we are lagging behind in many areas, especially in technology, which has allowed globalization to strongly impose itself on Arab societies. Consequently, many of the values tied to the Arab environment have faded away. Today, families face various challenges, particularly as we witness advancements in technology and modern techniques across various fields.

One of the most significant signs and indicators of this reality is the monopoly of communication technology by Western countries, which control the sources of information and deprive developing countries of them, creating an imbalance in the flow of information between different countries of the world. Modern communication and information technology have paved the way for Western media and culture to penetrate developing societies and threaten their identity and

culture. This new communication technology has created a new media reality, offering numerous and diverse media alternatives. There is no doubt that these new media outlets reflect cultural and civilizational environments with different ideas and perspectives.

And without a doubt, it has a direct impact on the cultural identity of nations. Therefore, the search for ways to protect Arab identity becomes a matter of great importance and necessity. Fears about the effects of cultural globalization on Arab and Islamic identity are growing day by day, especially in light of the diverse content presented in both Arab and foreign media, as well as on the internet. The world has become flooded with advanced technologies such as mobile phones and iPads, which have placed Arab families in a difficult position regarding how to raise and educate their children and protect them from the temptations presented on social media platforms. These technologies have erased many of the foundations and characteristics of the Arab family, which were once built on love and understanding, replacing them with foreign habits that are incompatible with the nature of Islamic society.

Recommendations:

1. Addressing Arab Societies' Challenges in the Face of Globalization:

The issue for Arab societies in confronting the challenges and byproducts of globalization lies in attempting to establish a new geopolitical environment different from the current one. This is essential for freeing themselves from political and technological dependence on the West, enabling them to position themselves economically. This would allow the Arab world to centralize around itself, thereby advancing the needs of its people and achieving their goals. There can be no economic reform outside of political, cultural, and social frameworks, as they all move in a unified direction.

2. Rebuilding a System Based on True Democracy:

Establish a system where freedoms and participation are genuinely practiced, and justice prevails. This would allow the restoration of relationships between the state and society within legal frameworks that enable the practice of democracy within state institutions. Each institution would resume its

designated roles, and civil society institutions would return to playing their part in developing society.

3. Revitalizing the Role of Socialization Institutions:

Reinvigorate socialization institutions on a scientific basis within a cultural and educational environment that regulates children's behaviors by teaching them what is acceptable and what is prohibited. This would help in controlling their emotions and behaviors.

4. Awareness Programs:

There should be awareness programs broadcasted through visual media to inform society members, especially families, about the dangers of globalization. These dangers often come with attractive slogans but are actually harmful, aiming to influence human thought, particularly in the Third World, through the policy of "survival of the fittest." Therefore, it is recommended to have social guidance programs that help society members utilize modern technologies (such as the internet, mobile phones, and satellite channels) in a beneficial way.

5. Strengthening Religious Values in Families:

Parents should guide their children by adhering to the teachings of the Quran, following its recommendations, and emulating its texts. Walking in the light of the Prophet's teachings will be a powerful weapon against the challenges posed by globalization.

6. Implementing a Joint Production Plan:

Create bridges between media institutions and various socialization institutions to develop programs that equip the Arab individual with diverse values and elements of Arab identity. This would allow for a balance between authenticity and modernity, taking from modernity only what does not conflict with the culture of Arab societies.

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