



Modernity in the Saudi Narrative Since the Rise of Electronic Media

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Abstract:

The Saudi narrative on modernity has fluctuated a lot because of electronic media. It is a communicative phenomenon rooted in the effect of technological progress within modernity and the role of virtual communication within the media environment. Saudi society has experienced modernity with tension, often shifting between accepting and rejecting its appearances. This paper reexplores modernity within the social Saudi narrative. Through a critical examination of the 1980s, via Al-Gathami's *Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (2005), this study reveals that electronic media in Saudi expands tolerance for difference and Otherness, blending traditional values with modern expression. This reflects a unique philosophy of communication, offering a biased reading of modernity in the digital age. Rather than embracing modernity unlimited, Saudi modernity remains collective, enabling textured representations of identity while resisting unquestioned faith in technological progress, individualism, and efficiency.

Keywords: philosophy of communication; modernity; Saudi Arabia; technology; electronic media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding modernity is a complex and vast task; understanding the puzzle of the Saudi approach to modernity is a task that involves multiple layers of discussion. Social media platforms, as one form of electronic media, show transformations in behavior in Saudi society, which rejected other representations of modernity 30 years ago. Taking one example of social media, Snapchat's business model is based on ephemerality, privacy control, and context. These three unique features combined drive a contemporary mobile-based literacy and vernacular worthy of exploration. In 2014, when the use of Snapchat was increasing in Saudi Arabia, users sold it to their peers citing its unique capability to control privacy settings online. At the time, it received limited attention from people who engaged primarily in non-virtual face-to-face interaction in gatherings with family and friends. However, over the past decade, Snapchat has met its professed aim of being the number one social media destination in Saudi Arabia as an app providing a spontaneous and contextualized socializing experience.

Today, users continue to be highly cautious in their interactions with the public, keeping their intimate messages for private circles. The ephemerality of messages creates an environment in which users feel comfortable sharing moments of their lives as they happen without the concern that they will be saved forever. Despite some risks and concerns identified with the use of social media, over 94% of the Saudi population are active users, and platforms such as Snapchat are particularly influential (Arab News, 2024). The country is ranked 6th among the highest users of Snapchat by geographical location after India and the United States (Dixon, 2024). This high take-up of Snapchat goes against the persistent trend toward resisting modernity that Abdullah Al-Gathami (2005) documents in "The Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

In the 1980s, some representations of the anti-modernity narrative gave rise to debate in the Saudi cultural scene. The socio-intellectual defense mechanism that drove the narrative was preoccupied with fear of the unknown. Al-Gathami's examination showed a narrow perception of modernity that threatened society's status quo, mediated through religious preaching, journalism, and intellectual salons. The social pattern of combating the "modernity of appearances" (Kraidy, 2018) is a recurrent theme in the Saudi narrative. The main controversy is that it has been maintained by social inspectors, who have controlled the academic discourse on modernity (Al-Gathami, 2005). Saudi media has been driven by "capitalist modernity" since the 1960s (Allogmany, 2023). However, Snapchat has empowered the Saudi populace to portray a textured version of their lived experiences, often diverging from single-perspective media narratives (Gajjala et al., 2024). Although Saudi modernity represents an individual response to technological culture, it is not rooted in individualism. Indeed, Saudi modernity stands against unquestioned faith in the trinity of modernity based on efficiency, technological progress, and individual autonomy (Arnett & Holba, 2012).

This paper contends that resisting modernity in the Saudi narrative, as originally articulated in Al-Gathami's (2005) work, represents a philosophy of communication that offers a Saudi version



of modernity in the era of electronic media. The “exercise” of expressing identity via subverting or adhering to rules (O’Hara, 2019) shows the considerable margin of narrative stability that Saudis enjoy, which provides greater tolerance for other representations of the Saudi self. Snapchat has empowered the Saudi populace to portray a textured version of their lived experiences, often diverging from traditional media narratives (Gajjala et al., 2024).

This study employs an interpretive methodology, engaging with philosophy of communication and media ecology. Arnett and Holba (2012), in “An Overture to Philosophy of Communication,” deliver a comprehensive exploration that situates various meanings of human communication studies within their philosophical and practical contexts. Philosophy of communication uses various philosophical lenses—epistemological, ontological, hermeneutical, phenomenological, dialectical, and pragmatic—and their interplay with communication studies offers rich observations of ideas and historical moments (Arnett & Holba, p. 3). Within philosophy of communication are studies on “narrative,” providing a context underlining speech and action.

The interpretive stream of communication studies has recently gained popularity (Mancino & Kearney, 2023). It offers a concrete alternative to mainstream research in Arab communication and media studies, which draws on many descriptive, historical, and empirical methodologies (Ayish, 1998). Media ecology concerns the intersection between the history of technology, psychology, biology, and even language, inter alia, and the study of the media environment. Lance Strate (2017) argues that media ecology studies are “more or less synonymous” with studying medium theory. It is, more or less, “the study of media environments, the idea that technology and techniques, modes of information and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs” (Strate, 2017, p. 45). Understanding the medium can help explain the varying effects and implications of different types of media (Strate, 2017, p. 88). It can also contribute to a greater understanding of the consequences of using social media, especially in Arab Muslim cultural contexts.

To trace what remains of the mid-20th century narrative on modernity in Saudi Arabia, this paper follows Snapchat as a unique communicative phenomenon that impacts situation and context. The first section is going to lay out the philosophical interpretive foundation that has been used to discuss media-related topics. It focuses on philosophy of communication, the metaphor of narrative within that, and its capabilities to shape human experiences. The following discussion will utilize Snapchat as a communicative artifact representing the nature of narrative transformation in Saudi modernity. The technology of managing privacy online, blended with ephemerality and other affordances, all challenge the established context of modernity, which rejects modernity. Lastly, the implications of this project for media ecology, philosophy of communication, and modernity are highlighted in the discussion of the Saudi narrative on modernity.

2. MODERNITY IN PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATION

Exploring the Saudi perception of modernity since the development and take-up of Snapchat does not exist in a void, but rather relates to a complex interaction of communication, philosophy,



and technology, especially concerning Snapchat and electronic media. Communication studies are of primary interest whenever behavioral transformation and social change become a pressing issue that needs interpretation and exploration. Communication has been at the core of the human experience since the Greek exploration of rhetoric (Arendt, 1958; Fisher, 1987). Philosophy, or what Michael Hyde (1982, p. vii) calls “philosophical comprehension,” is a prerequisite in re-exploring communicative phenomena in the contemporary technological historical moment. Within the philosophy of communication, modernity is best understood via its three consequences: progress, the culture of efficiency, and individualism (Arnett & Holba, 2012). Hyde (1982, p. 1) narrows the conceptualization of progress to “technological progress” to present the possibilities of the philosophy of communication and its relationship with technological advancements in the field of communication science (Farrell, 1987).

This study contextualizes the discussion to understand the impact of Snapchat on the perception of modernity in the Saudi narrative. The interplay of contextual meanings and appearances of modernity can shed light on the micro relationships between individuals, society, culture, reality, and considerations of the existence of media and its consequences in any system (Strate, 2017, p. 212). To unpack the complex nature of the impact of Snapchat on the perception of modernity in the Saudi narrative, this section will present the philosophy of communication as an interpretive method of inquiry, with a special focus on technology.

Philosophy of communication is an interpretive hub comprising diverse philosophical traditions that create a dialogical net and a mosaic of multiple narratives. The Western perspective on communication, rooted in longstanding philosophical frameworks and historical moments, provides a robust foundation for understanding the complex interplay of communication and philosophy. Arnett and Holba’s (2012) utilization of philosophical hermeneutics, drawing on the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) extend the study of interpretation and understanding. This interpretive project is rooted in the German human science, *Geisteswissenschaften*, and its intersection with the phenomenological tradition of thinkers, such as Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), and subsequent scholars, like Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Philosophical hermeneutics is underpinned by a profound respect for the text, the interpreter’s tradition, and the historical moment. Its goal is to refrain from imposing subjective interpretations on the text and to provide a transparent account of the interpretive process. This particularity of the philosophy of communication lies in guiding interpretation away from subjective biases and toward a deeper understanding of meaning. The interplay of the interpreter, the prejudices of a given tradition, and the examination of the text give rise to an interpretive dialogue—a fusion of horizons that brings multiple traditions into the conversation. This interplay allows new insights to emerge, enriching the discourse on communication and philosophy (Arnett & Holba, 2012).

Ricoeur’s philosophy of communication stresses the paramount importance of situating events within a narrative to provide an indisputably meaningful context for understanding the transition from behavior to action (Arnett & Holba, 2012). Ricoeur unequivocally argues the crucial role of



understanding the human condition through metaphors and narratives situated within “philosophical anthropology” (Arnett & Holba, 2012, p. 92). The focus on the narrative yields in-depth understanding and clarity situated within “emplotted” events that capture the imagination, commitment, and actions of people, providing insights into referents for interpretive understanding (Arnett & Holba, 2012, p. 94). The “referent” breaks with convention and opens up the world of a text anew. For instance, the narrative of modernity in the philosophy of communication is a metaphor developed pragmatically through the study of modern philosophy in a storytelling fashion. The term “storytelling” here is not used in the literary sense. The narrative of modernity refers to the prolonged process of human understanding, fluctuating between the Kantian (1724–1804) “moderate enlightenment,” which embraces universality, and dismantling the grand narratives that Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) described as the postmodern condition (Lyotard, 1984). The narrative of modernity is central to the working of the human mind as a mode of thinking formed by temporal, local, and social petit narratives, as opposed to abstract logic and the universal, modern, grand, scientific narrative (Lyotard, 1984).

Arnett and Holba’s (2012) philosophy of communication sums up a perspective of modernity that encompasses Charles Taylor’s (b. 1931) narrative of Western moral philosophy (2007) and Hannah Arendt’s (1906–1975) inspection of the narrative of the human condition (Arendt, 1958). It has deviated from literature and poetry toward communication studies since the 1980s (Arnett & Holba, 2012). It comes from humans as “*Homo narrans*,” with the whole communicative experience based on a symbolic enterprise of storytelling guided by history and culture (Fisher, 1987). It originates from the Greek rhetorical tradition and Western philosophy, in which “*διήγημα*” (later narration) refers to the chronological framework of documenting events. The narrative-grounded approach to engaging in qualitative/interpretive human communication research draws on public stories, participates in the scholarly craft of interpretation, and engages with a community of learners (Mancino & Kearney, 2023). It provides a comprehensive interpretive approach to exploring social events used widely in communication ethics (Arnett & Arneson, 1999), and sociocultural studies (Giddens, 1991). Modernity here represents a moment characterized by technological progress, a culture of efficiency, and individualism. The narrative of modernity becomes a speech “tested by people and competing world views, then is fashioned into a story with main characters, a history, and a direction” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, pp. 6–7).

Narratives form what Calvin O. Schrag calls the “communicative praxis” as the space of expression and action (Arnett & Holba, 2012), embracing habits, social customs, or institutional doctrines. They might not be written or communicated verbally, but they can be inherited and transferred through generations. The term “narrative” suggests looking for the virtues that guide beliefs and behaviors rather than struggling over the distinct forms of discourse to know who “owns” and controls truth (Fisher, 1987, p. 6).



The effect of technology in general, and mediated technology specifically, within the narrative of modernity has generated rich discussions concerning machine development. It affects religious, political, and traditional beliefs that Charles Taylor (2007) elaborates on in “The Secular Age” to study social change during Western society’s transition to modernity. Taylor (2007) analyzes the essential apparatuses that transformed society by examining religious, political, societal, and technological shifts. Society is described as first living in an enchanted world in which moral beliefs and spiritual values governed how individuals interacted with themselves, with God, and with the outer world. Then there was a gradual shift in those principles and how people absorbed technological and environmental adjustments, which changed how they defined religion and their social relationships. Later, in the disenchanted world, the individual moved from a “porous self” to a “buffered self” (Taylor, 2007). In the porous self, the person is a listener who is open to the public and believes in the power of the group. The buffered self, in contrast, is bounded by individualism and personal experience, which builds upon the self (Taylor, 2007). Connecting this to technological development, with a shift from orality and literacy to electronics, changed the face of European culture. The separation of religion and the self after the invention of the printing press in the 16th century shifted the epistemology of the oral tradition, leading to the rise of individualism (Meyrowitz, 1985).

The impact of electronic media in shaping modernity is significant. In his influential 1985 book “No Sense of Place,” the media ecologist Joshua Meyrowitz examines the impact of electronic media on modernity, exploring how science has shaped our sensory balance and sense of place. Meyrowitz draws on medium theory, as proposed by Marshall McLuhan, and social theory, as articulated by Erving Goffman, to examine the influence of technology on society. Medium theory is the “historical and cross-cultural study of the different cultural environments created by different media of communication” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 16). Moreover, he employs situationism, defined as “the exploration of the ways in which social behavior is shaped” by different social situations (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 16). Markowitz’s study of McLuhan’s tradition, represented in “Understanding Media,” published in 1964, and other books, broadens the conceptualization of the mechanism of social behavior (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 3). He addresses the question of authority since the Platonic rejection of literacy over orality and Elizabeth Eisenstein’s research on the shift from script to print and its effects on the transmission and transformation of ideas through various literary styles. This transition brought about a new understanding of authorship and intellectual property, with the printing press playing a pivotal role in propelling the advancement of modern science in the Western narrative. Modernization, as impacted by media, is the reason behind “structural changes in social situations” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 208). He argues that the rise of modernity has witnessed a blurring between physical and social places in a way that traditional social settings become “senseless” (p. 358). From there, Meyrowitz documents changes in gender roles, the presence of women in the public sphere, and the blurring of boundaries between the public and private spheres, all contributing to the “figures of speech and action” in the American society of the



1980s (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 38). Television, in particular, diminished the distinction between the public and private spheres, engaging people in cross-gender contexts, and leading to greater involvement in politics. People questioned their habits of the heart and chose individualism (Arnett & Holba, 2012).

2.2 From Resistance to Integration: The Complex Interplay of Modernity, Media, and Tradition in Saudi Society

The relationship between Saudi society and modernity has been turbulent throughout contemporary history. Abdullah Muhammad al-Ghathami's (2005) book, "The Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," narrates the complex push and pull between embracing and rejecting modernity in the nation. He was eager to enter the discussion concerning modernity in the 1980s when the cultural context refused to engage critically. There is no published English translation of his book, but that did not prevent scholars from engaging with his perspective in academic journals (Kraidy, 2018). Al-Gathami defines modernity as an "aware, attentive, or self-reflexive renewal" (Kraidy, 2018, p. 93). The only problem in Saudi Arabia was that it was constrained by what he calls social inspectors, who shaped and controlled the academic discourse on modernity in the Saudi context from the 1970s (al-Ghathami, 2005).

Al-Gathami contends that the mainstream stance on modernity in the mid-20th century is a sign of social patterns that reject the unknown. Their fear led to the rejection of aspects of modernity arising from the technologization of communication, the mechanization of transportation, and so on. Saudi Arabia initially refused to accept the Internet in the late 1990s: It faced significant resistance, even from within families. This conservatism persisted well into the 1990s, despite major Arab countries connecting to the Internet, leaving the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) regions behind (Kirchner, 2001, p. 145; Waheed et al., 2017). Television faced similar challenges upon its introduction, marking the country's initial interaction with electronic media. Moreover, modern technology has been used to oppose modernity itself. The adoption of traditional "modern network technologies" on a technological level was slow (Kirchner, 2001, p. 145) and contested due to its conflict with Islamic principles, particularly regarding the portrayal of the human form in media (Long, 2005, p. 86). Nonetheless, the technology behind media platforms dominated the scene and evolved to become an extension of ideas and beliefs. Hence, media is now widely accepted.

At its core, modern media, whether TV or Snapchat, is just a form of electronic media, a natural progression of technology within the march of modernity. Scholars have sought to understand this in relation to nonverbal communication research, using empirical and pragmatic models to analyze human communication and behavioral complexity (Meyrowitz, 1985). They align this with Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge formation, which views the public as a context shaped by "intersubjective" situational rules that bridge tangible and intangible boundaries (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 39). Topics such as "context collapse," whereby previously



distinct social contexts and performance stages converge (Borkovich & Breese, 2016; Shulman, 2017, p. 220), have been explored, as well as “stage breach,” where individuals willingly divulge private and personal information (Shulman, 2017, p. 221). The idea of media as encompassing “many things at once” (Shulman, 2017, p. 383) has been touched on, underscoring its diverse cultural, technological, normative, and historical-economic facets.

The past decade has seen the rapid rise of social media, a synonym of Web 2.0, which was first introduced by Tim O’Reilly in 2005 (Persuit, 2013). This comprises another representation of the mediated communicative phenomenon that surpasses the types of media previously explored. Social media entails creating and sharing original content, and the major control over that content lies with its users (Persuit, 2013). Popular applications of the World Wide Web include but are not limited to gaming and sharing platforms, wikis, blogs, and microblogs, such as X, Facebook, and Snapchat. Within this virtual form of communication, distinctions between the media environment and its components and between an environment and human interactions within it become “arbitrary” (Strate, 2017, p. 183). From a McLuhanian perspective, Meyrowitz (1985) contends that electronic media extend all senses both psychologically and physically. Human stories operate within the public sphere. They are composed of a “spectrum of information” and are influenced by diverse audiences from various professional backgrounds, different genders, and age groups (Meyrowitz, 1985, pp. 117, 130). Here, the public sphere represents the collective consciousness of any community, inherently shaped by various “stages of socialization” and “levels of authority” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 23). This consciousness changes the world and the environments in which communication occurs. Performances, both backstage and onstage, bounded by “regions” and perceptual boundaries all create the working narrative. Accordingly, this extends the idea that media is not only used to convey information but also reshapes contexts through a “multi-staged drama,” in which social performances occur (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 24).

Snapchat, as one platform within the panoply of technological progress, is a remarkable phenomenon. It was founded in 2011, based on a \$14 billion business model (Snapchat, 2023). It has three main features: ephemeral communication, extensive user privacy controls, and its “lightweight” user-friendly accessibility and affordance (Bayer et al., 2016). Ephemeral communication refers to the disappearing nature of messages, images, and videos, known as “Snaps,” which vanish once viewed in private chats or after 24 hours on the public “Stories” feature (Snapchat, 2023). Concerning privacy, Snapchat offers multiple interfaces that enable users to leverage their experiences according to their preferred experiences and the receiving audience (Albeshar & Alhussain, 2021). One can share a public story with a previously added friend, or with the whole global Snapchat community. There is also a private message interface, with pre-selected users gathered in customized small groups. There is always an option to create different, micro private spheres within the larger public, which is the core affordance of the app related to its accessibility.



With its ephemeral nature and broad scope for negotiating privacy and accessibility, Snapchat incorporates various features that make it a distinctive phenomenon in Saudi Arabia compared to other social media platforms (Albawardi & Jones, 2020; Alghamdi, 2021). Platforms such as Facebook and X have permanent, archived timelines. However, even when Instagram attempted to emulate Snapchat's ephemeral nature with its Stories feature, it received less user engagement, faced more content avoidance, and experienced reduced advertising effectiveness.

The popularity of Snapchat prevails despite proven spatial and temporal risk issues (Moubarak & Afthanorhan, 2024), privacy invasion allegations (Al-Saggaf & Wecke, 2011), and the threat of “fake images” (AlShariah & Saudagar 2019). Users acknowledge loneliness and issues with excessive disclosure (Al-Saggaf & Nielsen, 2014), as well as problems with peer pressure (Waheed et al., 2017). However, despite users’ perceptions of the effect of engaging in social media on their time, privacy, and social communications, the selfie culture exerts a considerable influence on individuals’ identity and cultural norms (Qutub, 2012).

Moreover, advertising plays a major role in influencing social change (Siddiqui & Alahmadi, 2022). The open e-commerce environment connects Saudi users to broader demographic patterns, exposing them to diverse cultural norms, beliefs, communication styles, and modes of self-presentation (Long, 2005, p. 63). This has led to a re-negotiation of traditional values in shaping the contemporary mobile based vernacular (Albawardi & Jones, 2020).

Al-Ghathami (2005) argues that visual culture has established specific guidelines for a new rhetoric of reception and symbolic exchange. Regardless of the novelty of the media, its reception will always tend to take a traditional cultural approach, significantly influencing the process of interpretation and comprehension. The Saudi social fabric is a mixture of rich historical components deeply rooted in Arab and Islamic identities. Its geographical location in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula closely ties it to the historical memory of the emergence of Islam, the latest monotheistic religion following Christianity and Judaism. This religious-based structure created the “unwritten” behavioral norms that have governed social interactions for decades. The spiritual and practical significance of Islam is embodied in the prominent holiness of Makkah and Madinah, two sacred destinations for Muslim populations worldwide.

The shift in communication on social media removes the cognitive context (Al-Gathami, 2005) derived from situations. Ephemerality, digitalized coloring, and visual effects all of which reflect a strong emphasis on celebrity and glamour in shaping memory degrading the cognitive attention toward shared and consumed content. The dynamics of print media and literacy differed significantly from this social media environment, especially when discussing the separation of gender spheres or family dynamics being more rigidly defined (Kirchner, 2001). However, Snapchat's visual layout has reinterpreted user privacy and content control in a manner that enhances its appeal, particularly among users who prioritize personal and real-time communication. This physical segregation of space reflects broader societal norms and is mirrored in the digital



realm, where similar boundaries are now being navigated and redefined. It vividly illustrates the urban settlement of Saudi families within their most private spaces—their homes. It enables them to manage their privacy effectively within the private friends list they create. Moreover, this design empowers users to skillfully curate, manage, and personalize their online presence for public or semi-private profiles, catering to both communal and commercial purposes of communication.

The merging of male and female information systems has led to significant changes in social roles. Meyrowitz (1985, p. 4) notes that when “a private situation becomes more public by being merged into other situations, behavior style must adapt and change.” Before social media, information and experiences shared within a gender group were often kept secret from the opposite sex. In today’s social network-dominated environment, however, these barriers have largely been dismantled. For example, Saudi women can now share photographs and videos from their private lives without the veil or public restrictions, and these can be viewed and interacted with by a male audience. This open sharing challenges traditional social roles and creates new dynamics in how individuals present themselves based on the content they share and the social situations in which they share it. The “privileges of information access” arising from the ability to share content from private spaces through the Internet are contributing to a new social order in Saudi Arabia, much in the way television began reshaping social structures in the United States decades ago.

3. REFLECTION: A CONTROLLED SENSE OF SAUDI MODERNITY

This reflective study examines the evolving Saudi narrative of modernity in the age of electronic media, particularly through the lens of Snapchat. Historically, Saudi Arabia has experienced a complex relationship with modernity, marked by resistance to certain aspects of technological and cultural change, as articulated by Al-Gathami (2005). In this context, the introduction of Snapchat offers a compelling case study on how modernity is negotiated in the digital era. While Saudi modernity has resisted the wholesale acceptance of individualism, the culture of efficiency and progress typically associated with Western modernity, the country has found a way of engaging selectively with elements of modernity through platforms like Snapchat, crafting a distinctly Saudi version.

Snapchat’s unique affordances—ephemerality, privacy control, and spontaneity—mirror the cultural and religious frameworks that have long shaped Saudi society. Unlike platforms such as Facebook or Instagram, which have the characteristics of permanence and visibility, Snapchat allows users to navigate between public and private spheres with greater flexibility, creating what Meyrowitz (1985) and others explored as “context collapse” (Borkovich & Breese, 2016). This ability to manage privacy and selectively engage with public spaces aligns with traditional Saudi values, offering a “controlled modernity” that does not fully embrace the individual autonomy typical of Western technological engagement (Alghamdi, 2021).



At the heart of this shift lies a subtle transformation in societal behavior. The public, private, and social spheres have not undergone radical upheaval but have instead been manipulated in ways that reflect the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity. While the political, legal, and Sharia frameworks remain intact, new interpretations of these frameworks are emerging, leading to a nuanced manipulation of societal norms. Snapchat's ephemerality, for instance, has altered the perception of what is "ideal." Perfection in the Snapchat era is momentary, contextual, and genuine—qualities that challenge traditional notions of the ideal as permanent and unchanging. The shifting nature of the ideal on Snapchat suggests that while the fundamental values remain, how they are expressed and understood has evolved (Bayer et al., 2016).

In this regard, Snapchat has become more than just a platform for social interaction; it is a space in which traditional boundaries are both maintained and challenged. Much like the architectural design of Saudi homes, where spaces are segregated by gender, Snapchat offers users the ability to control their online environments, creating private spheres within the larger digital public. This reflects broader social customs in Saudi Arabia, where gender roles and cross-gender interactions are carefully managed; Snapchat provides a means of exploring these dynamics within a digital framework (Al-Saggaf & Wecke, 2011).

Moreover, this shift in behavior underscores the changing image of modernity in Saudi Arabia. Snapchat's visual nature, where images and ephemeral content take precedence over text and language, has transformed how users engage with modernity. As Meyrowitz (1985) notes, the dominance of electronic media alters our sensory and social structures, and in Saudi Arabia, Snapchat is playing a pivotal role in this process. By prioritizing images and visual communication, the platform has reshaped how modernity is perceived—not as a rejection of tradition, but as a reimagining of it within a digital, visual-first culture.

Ultimately, this study reveals that the Saudi narrative on modernity is not one of complete transformation, but rather one of subtle shifts. Platforms like Snapchat, while reinforcing some traditional boundaries, also offer new opportunities for self-expression and societal engagement. This selective adoption of modernity suggests that Saudi society continues to evolve, negotiating the complexities of technological progress while maintaining a strong connection to its cultural and religious roots. In this way, Snapchat serves as both a mirror and a mold for the ongoing dialogue about modernity in Saudi Arabia.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the relationship between Saudi modernity and the rise of electronic media, particularly Snapchat. It highlights how modernity is being selectively embraced within a cultural and religious narrative that continues to shape Saudi society. The purpose of this paper was to examine how Snapchat, with its unique affordances of ephemerality, privacy control, and



spontaneity, has influenced societal behavior. Snapchat contributed to the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity in Saudi Arabia.

The introduction of Snapchat in Saudi Arabia reflects a shift in how modernity is understood and practiced within contemporary society. Although the political, legal, and religious frameworks remain largely intact, platforms such as Snapchat have allowed new interpretations of modernity that blend old values with the demands of the digital age. The platform's ability to collapse the boundaries between public and private spaces offers instead a controlled environment in which users can engage with modernity on their own terms. This selective engagement contrasts with the more individualistic and efficiency-driven modernity seen in the West, suggesting that Saudi modernity remains deeply tied to communal values.

At the heart of this examination is the reflection on how societal behaviors have subtly shifted without completely abandoning the foundational structures of Saudi culture. While traditional norms around privacy, gender roles, and modesty persist, Snapchat has created a space in which these norms can be both upheld and reimagined. The concept of the ideal, once fixed and permanent, is now contextual, momentary, and fluid, shaped by the ephemerality of digital interactions. This study has demonstrated that Snapchat's influence on Saudi modernity is not about radical transformation but rather about negotiating change within existing cultural boundaries.

In conclusion, Saudi modernity in the digital era represents a delicate balancing act—one that allows for the adoption of new technologies like Snapchat while maintaining a strong connection to cultural and religious traditions. The implications of this study suggest that electronic media, far from eroding Saudi values, offer a platform for reinterpreting and reinforcing them in ways that resonate with contemporary society. As Saudi Arabia continues to evolve within the global digital landscape, the interplay between modernity, technology, and tradition will remain central to understanding its unique path forward.



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